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AN  
ILLUSTRATION  
OF THE  
GENERAL EVIDENCE,  
ESTABLISHING  
THE REALITY  
OF  
CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

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By GEORGE COOK, D. D. F. R. S. E.

MINISTER OF LAURENCEKIRK,

AUTHOR OF HISTORY OF THE REFORMATION IN SCOTLAND;  
GENERAL AND HISTORICAL VIEW OF CHRISTIANITY, &c.

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SECOND EDITION.

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EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR WAUGH AND INNES;

M. OGLE, GLASGOW; AND JAMES DUNCAN, LONDON.

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M.DCCC.XXVI.

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## PREFACE.

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IN the following Treatise, I have endeavoured clearly to illustrate the General Evidence for the Resurrection of Christ; to trace its connection with some principles and laws of human nature, universally recognised; and from this connection to show how plainly and forcibly it establishes the reality of that interesting event. In the discussion of such a subject, it is impossible to avoid repeating what has often, and with much energy, been stated; but, as the arrangement, and occasionally the mode of illustration, are different from those which other writers have adopted, I trust, that the whole argument is placed in a light, in which perhaps it is not generally viewed, but in which its strength may be very distinctly perceived.

At a period when, from the progress of luxury and licentiousness, men are naturally too much disposed to emancipate themselves from what are regarded as the restraints of religion, and when these powerful causes are assisted by the dissemination of a most deceitful, yet imposing philosophy, it appears to me to be a duty incumbent upon those friends of revelation, whose situation permits them to do so, to exhibit, under every aspect, the numerous proofs of the Divine origin of Christianity.

From the immense diversity with regard to extent of understanding, and acuteness of perception, which exists amongst mankind, variety of illustration has been found highly useful, wherever demonstration could not be applied; and this circumstance alone might sufficiently show the fallacy of an opinion, at present very universally entertained, that it is unnecessary to add to the works which have been already written in defence of Christianity, because these works really contain all which can be urged to defend it. It may, however, be further observed, that by those who are anxious to promote the investigation of truth, every attempt to mark the precise boundary beyond which inquiry cannot profitably advance,

will be strenuously resisted. Upon many subjects, experience has shown with how little foundation such attempts have been made; and it is certain that, had the opinion which I have mentioned been adopted with implicit acquiescence, when it first was announced, the world would have been deprived of several of the most able and successful efforts to confirm the truth of our holy religion.

But although it should be allowed, that no additional force can now be given to the evidences of Christianity, the necessity of occasionally illustrating them is very far from being superseded. While they continue to be assailed by new opponents, who might mistake silence for victory, it is surely of consequence to show, that victory has not been obtained; and it is essential to the sacred cause of religion, to point out the weakness or fallacy of objections urged with the confidence that they cannot be resisted, although, in fact, differing more in appearance than in reality from those which have been often refuted. In this manner, many who have been misled will be much more successfully undeceived, than by leaving the enmity of those who are engaged in war against revelation, to be counteracted by the



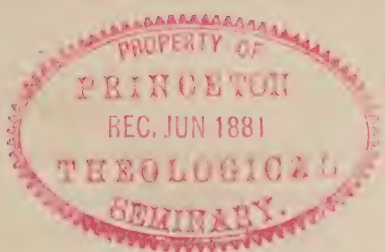
slow influence of works, inestimable in value, but most of which, such is the fate which often awaits even the most brilliant productions of genius, are now known more from the reputation of their writers, than from an accurate acquaintance with what they contain.

Under such impressions, I composed the following work; and I now commit it to the press, with the solicitude which it is so natural to feel about the estimation in which it may be held, but not altogether without the hope, that it may be, in some degree, instrumental in confirming impressions of the truth of Christianity.

LAURENCE KIRK,

*February 1808.*





## PREFACE

TO DUODECIMO EDITION

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MANY years have elapsed since I published the following work. Upon its first appearance it was very favourably reviewed by most of the leading periodical Journals of the day, and although, from accidental circumstances, it has never been extensively circulated, it has frequently, without acknowledgment, been consulted, and often honourably quoted, by succeeding writers on the evidences of Christianity.

Having, of late, been led carefully to peruse it, and to make such alterations, chiefly on the mode of expression, as may render the train of reasoning more easily apprehended, I have been induced to print it, in the present cheap and accessible form, by the hope that its usefulness may thus be extended, and particularly that it may be of service to that numerous class of readers who, in

consequence of our commercial and manufacturing prosperity, have recently arisen in Britain. This important and valuable part of the community are, from their peculiar situation, much exposed to the confident and insidious representations of infidelity, but with their habits of reflection they are quite competent justly to appreciate, when it is distinctly exhibited to them, the powerful testimony by which the interesting and unspeakably momentous fact of our Saviour's Resurrection, the great foundation upon which the truth of the Gospel rests, is so convincingly established.

This testimony, or the General Evidence for the reality of the Resurrection, it is my object fully to illustrate; and, connected as it is with those principles in our nature by which all men are constantly influenced, and by which our belief is invariably directed, it is difficult to conceive that it can be seriously and candidly examined without our discerning how strong is the reason with which we are furnished by it for the faith that is in us.

To those who value the Christian religion as the source of the purest morality, and of the most

refined happiness, or who have experienced the comfort and support, which, amidst the trials and sorrows of life, it so tenderly imparts, no excuse will be requisite for my thus endeavouring, by impressing its divine origin on the understanding, to pave the way for its benignant influence over the heart and conduct.

LAURENCE KIRK,  
*November 1825.*



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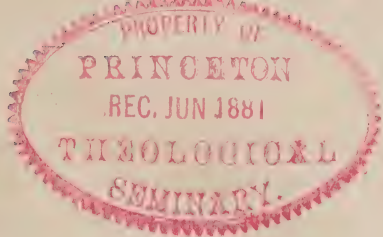
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## INTRODUCTION.

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UPON the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the Scriptures explicitly rest the truth of his religion. If, therefore, that event never took place, however we may admire the purity and excellence of his doctrine, or the many amiable features of his character, we must consider him as a man who no doubt discovered what had eluded the research of the wisest and most enlightened philosophers, but whose pretensions to a divine mission were entirely without foundation.

To all then who are suitably impressed with the infinite importance of ascertaining whether Christianity be a revelation from God, it must be in the highest degree interesting to examine the evidence for the reality of the resurrection, and to determine whether that evidence be sufficient to produce a rational and a steady belief.

That a resurrection from the dead is possible, cannot be doubted by any who have just sentiments of the Divine Nature. Some ancient philosophers, whose ideas of God were much obscured by their metaphysical

speculations, assuming it as a first principle that the body was the prison of the soul, and conceiving that no considerable progress towards perfection could be made till the union between them was dissolved, taught, that the Deity could not re-animate the material frame. But, in modern times, when, whatever may be the origin of Christianity, much more elevated conceptions of the Supreme Being are universally entertained, no one can fail to discern the fallacy of this opinion, or can have any hesitation in admitting, that He who called his creatures out of nothing could, with the same ease with which he originally imparted existence, give back that existence after it had been withdrawn.

And it will on all hands be readily acknowledged, that no more unequivocal or striking proof of divine interposition could be desired than the resurrection of the messenger who announced it. This is so evidently beyond the reach of human power, that we must of necessity ascribe it to him who established the laws of nature, and who alone, either by his immediate agency, or through the instrumentality of beings authorised by him, can alter or suspend them.

Taking then for granted the possibility of a resurrection, and the sufficiency of such an event to prove the truth of the revelation which it is adduced to confirm, I shall endeavour, in this treatise, clearly to state what may be called the general evidence for the resurrection of Christ ; showing that after having expired upon the cross, and lain for a considerable time in the grave, he did, agreeably to what is recorded in the evangelícal



histories, appear upon earth, converse often with his disciples, and completely satisfy them that he was alive.

This general evidence arises from the following sources :

1. From the prophecies of Jesus, that at a certain time he was to rise from the dead, conjoined with his wisdom.

2. From the fact, that, at this precise time, his body was, by the confession of all who had access to know, not to be found in the sepulchre in which it had been laid, although the most effectual precaution had been taken to prevent its removal.

3. From the positive testimony of the disciples, that, after this time, they frequently saw him, conversed with him, and received from him those instructions upon which they acted in publishing his gospel.

4. From the success which attended their preaching, founded upon the alleged fact that he had actually risen.

These four branches seem to comprehend the whole of the general evidence for the resurrection ; and, if I shall be able to place them in their proper light, I have no doubt that they will be seen to afford sufficient reason for assenting to the truth of Christianity.



# ILLUSTRATION, &c.

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## PART FIRST.

THERE IS EVIDENCE FOR THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION DERIVED FROM THE PROPHECIES OF JESUS, THAT, AT A CERTAIN TIME, HE WAS TO RISE FROM THE DEAD, TAKEN IN CONJUNCTION WITH HIS WISDOM.

FROM an early period of his ministry, Jesus gave intimations that he was to suffer death, but that in three days he was to rise from the grave. The prejudices of his disciples, who, with the rest of their countrymen, expected a triumphant Messiah, and who, from their connexion with our Lord, were fondly anticipating the time, when, laying aside his disguise, he would ascend the throne of David, rendered them long inattentive to these intimations. But, as the time of his sufferings drew near, he spoke to them so plainly of what was to happen, and so often fixed their attention upon it, that they were at length reluctantly convinced that he was really to be put to death, and that, in some way, though to them incomprehensible, he was to be restored to life.

This interesting information respecting his crucifixion and his resurrection, he did not confine to those

of his own household ; he frequently imparted it to the multitudes who listened to his discourses. Accordingly, one of the historians of his life has mentioned what, had it not been true, he could not have stated, without laying himself open to immediate detection, and thus completely discrediting his history,—that the chief priests and rulers, who had succeeded in effectuating the death of Jesus, came to Pilate, the Roman governor, and requested that he would give them a guard to surround the sepulchre ; assigning, as the reason for making the request, that the deceiver, as they contemptuously styled him, had said, that after three days he was to rise from the grave ; and that, therefore, if they did not make the sepulchre sure till the expiration of that time, his disciples might remove the body, and then confidently publish to the world that this prophecy had been fulfilled.\*

\* Almost the whole of the circumstantial, and part of the direct evidence, for the truth of the resurrection, rest upon the supposition, that the evangelical histories are genuine records, were published in the age to which they are usually attributed, and are accurate vouchers for what they narrate as facts universally known, and received at the period of their publication. The proof of this is very full and satisfactory ; it has often been distinctly stated, and thorough acquaintance with it is essential for justly appreciating the evidence of Christianity ; but I can give here only a summary account of it. There is evidence that Christ lived during the reign of Tiberius, that he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, that he was the author of a new religion, and that great multitudes early embraced it ; and this evidence is derived from the testimony of heathen writers, to which no objection can be made. These facts render it highly probable, previously to any inquiry what was really the case, that a history of the life and death of Jesus, of his doctrines and precepts, would be composed and circulated among the numerous converts who received the faith, and even died to support it. Agreeably

But these plain, and repeated intimations of an event so amazing as the resurrection, cannot, in the case of

to this we find, that there are books said to have been written by his immediate disciples, and which are precisely such histories as I have mentioned. Whether they were actually written by the persons whose names they bear, is a simple historical question, to be decided in the same way in which we determine whether the works ascribed to any ancient author, were written by him. Now there is all the proof that the Gospels are genuine books which, according to the ordinary course of nature, could have existed. They are enumerated and quoted by a series of writers from the era of their publication, that is, from the institution of the church, to the present day ; they were admitted by the earliest adversaries of Christianity to be the records of Christian faith ; and on this account alone, much ingenuity was exerted to depreciate and misrepresent them. There is no surer mode by which their genuineness could be certified to us except a continued miracle, which, being unnecessary, could not reasonably be expected.

As there is thus more reason for believing that the Gospels are the works of the authors to whom they are ascribed, than that the Commentaries of Cæsar, or the Orations of Cicero, for example, are the productions of these authors, so there is stronger evidence of their purity, that is of their being, as to every thing material, in the state in which they proceeded from the writers, than, from the nature of the case, there can be for the purity of any other ancient book. The Christian church was very early split into sects, each of which appealed to the Scriptures, and watched with the utmost jealousy over this common standard of their faith. Had the smallest alteration, for the purpose of supporting any opinion, been made by one sect, the enmity of its opponents would have secured immediate detection, and the certainty of this could not fail to deter from a practice which every party too might have employed. Accordingly, a careful examination of the earliest versions, of versions from all quarters of the church, and of all different sects, has established, that no material alterations have crept into the sacred records, the slight differences which subsist among these versions, not affecting any important fact or doctrine, and being sufficiently accounted for

Jesus, be reconciled with the supposition that he was an impostor. Had he been so, and had he been eager, by means of a pretended resurrection, to perpetuate his doctrine in the world, he would either have been altogether silent about his death, or he would have anxiously turned away the public attention from it. By acting in this manner, he might have laid some foundation for his imposture, at least he would have enabled his accomplices in the fraud to assert that he had risen, without apprehending that they would be exposed by any, who, from actual observation, could have affirmed

by the carelessness, or inaccuracy of the numberless transcribers, who, before the invention of printing, were employed to multiply copies of the New Testament.

There is also internal evidence of the genuineness of the Gospels, upon which I cannot here enter ; but what has been said may satisfy every candid inquirer, that these books were published in the first age of the church ; and from this it follows, that we may reason from such facts as are by them stated to have been generally believed at the period of their publication, and to which no objection has been made by those early enemies of Christianity, who could have pointed out any inaccuracy or violation of truth. For example, it is evident that the Evangelists, although they had been deceivers, would not have asserted that Jesus was publicly crucified if he never had been crucified ; that at the request of the Pharisees a guard was placed at the sepulchre, if no such guard had been provided ; or that it was commonly reported, when they wrote, that the disciples stole away the body, if no such report had ever been in circulation ; because they must have perceived that, if they did so, they in fact discovered to every body that the whole story which they published was a fabrication. An impostor must be accurate in what he represents as public facts at the time of his writing ; his art consists in so associating with these the pretended facts for which he wishes to gain credit, that the unavoidable admission of the real facts may seem to carry along with it the truth of his imposture.



that the assertion was false. Instead of this, however, he seemed most desirous to fix the eyes of his enemies upon the tomb in which he was to be laid, and to secure them as witnesses that he had deceived men ; in other words, he did what directly tended to defeat his scheme, or to render vain any attempt to carry it into execution.

If, then, he was not commissioned by God, his conduct can be attributed only to the most violent enthusiasm, or to a great degree of mental imbecility ; and the more so, because the time which he marked out for his resurrection was so very near the time of his death, that the anxiety which was felt to detect him would infallibly exist through it in full strength, and would give rise, on the part of his enemies, to a degree of vigilance in making the detection, which, had the period been longer, would naturally have relaxed.

But can enthusiasm, or weakness of understanding, be ascribed to Jesus Christ ? We have had his doctrine faithfully transmitted to us, and no one who is acquainted with it can, I think, hesitate to give the answer. If he had no illumination from Heaven, and if the discoveries which he made to the world were the deductions of his own reason, he was unquestionably the most extraordinary man who ever appeared upon earth. His views of God, founded on the most enlightened reason, have been admired through every succeeding generation ; have been adopted, illustrated, and defended, even by the enemies of his religion ; while the morality which he taught is distinguished by a purity, an extent, and a sublimity, for which we look in vain in the most elaborate moral writings of the sages of Greece and Rome.

And can we, with the slightest shadow of reason, suppose that a man thus enlightened, possessed of an

understanding so very far exceeding the ordinary measure of human capacity, and which must have been long exercised in the most profound and abstruse thought, would not see the folly of announcing to men, whose strongest interests impelled them to refuse their assent, an event which he was himself absolutely certain could never happen, or that he would not discern, that the consequence of his doing so would be the immediate detection of the imposture? This consequence so obviously follows, that the least acute, who think at all upon the subject, at once perceive it.

There arises, then, from the predictions of Jesus, taken in conjunction with the vigour and enlargement of his understanding, a very strong presumption in favour of the truth of the resurrection; such a presumption as, had it been connected with any common fact, would have gained for it almost universal credit.

## PART SECOND.

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THERE IS EVIDENCE FOR THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION DERIVED FROM THE FACT, THAT, AT THE PRECISE TIME WHICH HE SPECIFIED, THE BODY OF JESUS WAS, BY THE CONFESSION OF ALL WHO HAD ACCESS TO KNOW, NOT TO BE FOUND IN THE SEPULCHRE IN WHICH IT HAD BEEN LAID, ALTHOUGH THE MOST EFFECTUAL PRECAUTION HAD BEEN TAKEN TO PREVENT ITS REMOVAL.

THAT the body of Jesus was not in the sepulchre on the third day, is a fact established by the most satisfactory evidence. The women who came from the city to embalm the body, saw, when they drew near to the sepulchre, that the great stone, which had been placed at the door of it, was rolled away, and they were informed that the body of Jesus was not there ; the disciples, who soon after entered the tomb, found the clothes in which the body had been wrapped, but the body itself was gone ; and the soldiers, who had been placed as a guard, reported, in the utmost consternation, to those who had employed them, that the sepulchre was empty.

But there is, in addition to this concurring testimony of these different descriptions of persons, who, at this period, could have held no communication with each other, and some of whom certainly expected to find the

body, a proof of the truth of what they asserted, which cannot be questioned. If the body of Jesus had been in the sepulchre, it must have been in the possession of the chief priests and pharisees, who, most assuredly, to serve their own cause, would, upon the first rumour of the resurrection, have produced it, and thus, in the most certain of all ways, by satisfying every man that Jesus was still dead, have for ever dissipated a delusion which had created to them so much uneasiness and apprehension.

It being thus certain that the body was taken out of the sepulchre, the only point to be ascertained is, in what manner it was removed, whether by the disciples and friends of Jesus, according to the account circulated by his enemies, or whether, agreeably to the account given by the Gospels, he was raised from the dead by the power of God, and was thus enabled to come forth from the tomb?

That the body could not be taken away by the disciples, can be as certainly established as any event, at such a distance of time, and of such a nature, can be.

In consequence of the predictions of Jesus, his enemies, as was to be expected, eager to prevent any new agitation of the public mind, or any new attempt to destroy their influence and to unmask their hypocrisy, determined to guard the sepulchre so effectually as to keep possession of the body till the end of the three days. For this purpose, as has been already mentioned, they procured from Pilate a band of Roman soldiers, men accustomed to all the hardships of a military life, trained under the most rigorous discipline, and sharing the determined bravery which at this time characterized the troops of the empire. These soldiers surrounded the door of the sepulchre, the only door to it; for it is to be remarked, that it was hewn out of a rock, and

could not, without much labour, which it would have been impossible to conceal, have been rendered by any other way accessible.

Upon such a body of men, an attack could not have been successfully made, except by another body equally, or more powerful; the sepulchre, therefore, could not have been wrested from them without bloodshed, and without such a struggle as must have attracted general observation, and must, from the interesting consequences which were likely to result from it, have been, by those who were hostile to Jesus, faithfully recorded.

On the supposition then, that his disciples, had they been inclined, were in a situation to have got possession of the sepulchre by force, the fact, that not the most distant insinuation has ever been thrown out that they actually did so, renders it in the highest degree probable, either that this scheme had never occurred to them, or that they had too much timidity, or too much principle, to carry it into execution.

But it is needless to make a supposition plainly without foundation. The truth is, that the disciples, however much they might have been inclined, could not have found among themselves a sufficient number for so hazardous an enterprise. Jesus himself had never received any support from the powerful; he had, from the commencement of his ministry, been marked out as an object of the most cruel and unprincipled persecution; and even the great body of the people, although at some times yielding to the dictates of nature, they felt and expressed for him the highest veneration, had, in the end, through the artifice of those who directed their opinions, been so completely estranged from him, that they insisted upon his being put to death; and had shown the most savage and unrelenting inhumanity in accomplishing his destruction.

His avowed disciples consisted of some helpless women, and of a few men without influence, chosen from the humblest ranks of life. By neither of these could the violence requisite for gaining possession of the sepulchre have been employed ; and if there were some in superior stations, who secretly believed in Jesus, and this we know to have been the case, still it is evident that they would not have openly interfered, because there were more powerful reasons for concealing their faith, at this juncture, than there had been at the time when they were afraid or unwilling to confess it.

But there is evidence of the strongest kind that no attempt was made by the disciples to carry off the body, furnished by the very story which the chief men among the Jews devised to account for the removal.

When the soldiers, in terror, reported what had happened, the Pharisees, aware of the importance of concealing the fact, or, at all events, of fortifying the people against the impression which the rumour of it would naturally make upon them, prevailed upon these men by bribery, and by assurance of protection from the punishment to which neglect of duty subjected them, to publish through Jerusalem, that they had fallen asleep upon guard, and that, while they were in this state, the disciples had stolen away the body. This story is of value, because the whole construction of it vindicates the disciples of Jesus from the charge of having attacked the sepulchre ; but, like many other stories, hastily invented to answer a particular purpose, it is so very absurd, that it is astonishing that credulity itself could have been deluded by it.

If all the soldiers were asleep, as they said, how, as it has been often asked, could they know who carried off the body, or in what manner this was done ? and if,



to get rid of the difficulty, it be supposed that one of them might have been awake, the story is no less incredible; for, in this case, that person, when he perceived the cautious approach of the disciples, would have awakened his companions, and the scheme would thus have been defeated.

But the improbability of this account becomes, if possible, still more striking from the characters and situation of those who were induced to propagate it. That sixty men, of any description, when upon guard, should, at the same moment, fall asleep, is not very likely; but that sixty Roman soldiers should do so, men so much accustomed to watch with unremitted vigilance, and who were certain that, if they did not thus watch, they would be punished with death, is, it may be safely said, in the highest degree incredible.

And even supposing that this had most unaccountably happened, still, as it was an event which no sagacity could have foreseen, and upon the faith of which therefore no men in their senses could have acted, how, it is natural to ask, were the disciples so near at hand to take advantage of it? They were in this respect at least most singularly fortunate, since, if they had been guided by prudential motives they would have remained at a distance.

What, however, was the real state of mind of those few disciples who are represented as the daring instruments in stealing from a band of armed men the body of their master? They were in the greatest consternation, and, notwithstanding all the attempts of Jesus to prepare them for his death, when they saw it approaching, they forsook him. Even their faith in his resurrection seems to have been shaken. Many of them, it is probable, were in as great despondency as the two whom he overtook going to Emmaus, and who

said to him, we trusted that this was he who was to have redeemed Israel. And is it probable that these men, before the first impressions of terror could be effaced, would undertake what required the utmost coolness, the most determined resolution, and an utter contempt of death, which they had so lately beheld with the weakest timidity? In every point of view this story, circulated by the enemies of Christianity, appears inconsistent and incredible; and there can therefore be no hesitation in concluding that the disciples had no part, and could have had no part, in taking the dead body of Jesus out of the sepulchre.

As, however, the fact that it was removed is undoubted, there must be some way by which the removal was accomplished. There is only one, different from that which has been stated, and it is distinctly mentioned by those who profess to transmit an accurate and authentic history of the life of Jesus. These men narrate, and they do so with all the simplicity of truth, and as if what they were narrating had no tendency to exalt their master, that the stone which had been placed at the gate of the sepulchre was removed by an earthquake; that the awfulness of this event, heightened by the descent of angels, threw the soldiers into a state of terror, which suspended their recollection, and clouded their senses; and that, while they were in this situation, Jesus, who had been restored to life, came out of the tomb. But acquiescence in this account, I need not observe, implies an assent to the truth of the resurrection.

The amount of that part of the proof contained in the two propositions which have been illustrated, may be summed up in a few words; and as it is different in its nature from the rest of the evidence, it may not be improper, before going farther, to exhibit it in one point of view. Jesus Christ publicly declared, times without



number, that, on the third day after his death, he was to be restored to life ; his enemies, to prevent imposition, surrounded the tomb in which he had been laid with an armed force ; yet, notwithstanding this precaution, at the time specified, his body was not to be found in the sepulchre. The account which the soldiers gave of the mode of its removal, it is impossible to believe ; while it is evident that the disciples and friends of Jesus had no concern in the removal. There seems from all this to be no alternative, but to adopt the explanation given by the Evangelists.

These particulars constitute what may very properly be called the circumstantial evidence for the truth of the resurrection ; a kind of evidence with which all are acquainted ; which does very often determine our belief ; and which can never be rationally disregarded, except when the circumstances which compose it do not imply the reality of the fact which they are adduced to confirm ; or, to speak perhaps more accurately, except when the existence of these circumstances can be satisfactorily accounted for, without admitting what they are alleged to prove.

Let any man lay his hand upon his heart and say, whether, if evidence equally strong with that which has been stated, were produced in a court of justice, to establish a fact not connected with religion, he would have the slightest hesitation to assent to the fact, and, upon his faith in it, to pronounce a decision affecting the character, or even the life of a fellow-creature. If he can give, as I think, if he be acquainted with the nature and effect of evidence, he will give, but one answer, he should hesitate before he reject the evidence, merely because it relates to a different kind of fact from that which usually falls under his observation. The circumstance of a fact being miraculous, does, I

readily admit, render a higher degree of evidence requisite ; upon this ground only, however, that the probability of being mistaken with regard to such a fact is greater than in ordinary cases. But what is evidence for a common fact, is unquestionably, to a certain extent, evidence for a supernatural one ; and when we reject sufficient evidence, by which I mean, evidence where confessedly no defect can be discovered, merely from the unusualness of the fact to be established, we violate a clear law of our nature, by which belief is connected with such evidence. In one word, the nature of a fact is quite a different consideration from the evidence which proves it ; this nature does not change the nature or effect of evidence ; and it is most unphilosophically confounding two things altogether distinct, when we imagine that it does so.

From the circumstantial evidence for the truth of the resurrection, this much, at least, may fairly be deduced, that it is more probable that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, than that he did not ; and hence it follows, that this event ought not to be hastily and carelessly disbelieved, but that there are the strongest reasons for most earnestly and attentively examining the direct evidence which can be brought forward to confirm it. That evidence I shall state more fully than I have done the circumstantial evidence ; and I shall endeavour to do so with all the clearness which the interesting nature of the subject to which it relates renders peculiarly desirable.

## PART THIRD.

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THERE IS EVIDENCE FOR THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION DERIVED FROM THE POSITIVE TESTIMONY OF THOSE WHO WERE WITNESSES OF THE FACT ; COMPREHENDING THE PLAIN AND REPEATED DECLARATIONS OF THE APOSTLES OF JESUS, THAT THEY OFTEN SAW HIM AFTER HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD ; THAT THEY CONVERSED WITH HIM ; AND HAD EVERY POSSIBLE PROOF THAT HE WAS REALLY ALIVE.

It is evident, from many passages in the Gospels, that the apostles were not the only persons who saw Jesus after the resurrection. He appeared to some of the women who came to the sepulchre ; he was seen by five hundred brethren at once ; and that he openly showed himself, at least upon one other occasion, is highly probable, from an observation incidentally made by one of the evangelists, that when the eleven saw him in Galilee they worshipped him, but some doubted ; some, not certainly of those who, from their conviction that he was Jesus raised from the dead, had just worshipped him, but of those who were accidentally present at this striking scene.

It is sufficient, however, to select the apostles as witnesses of the resurrection, because they maintained a closer intercourse with their Master than any of the other

persons who saw him ; and because, if their veracity be established, the fact will be proved as completely as if there had been the testimony of any number whatever.\* Now, before we can consider the testimony of the apostles as entitled to belief, we must be satisfied that they could not be deceived themselves ; and that, reasoning from the principles and constitution of human nature, they could have no motive for deceiving others.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE APOSTLES COULD NOT BE THEMSELVES DECEIVED.

FOR ascertaining the degree of credit which ought to be attached to the testimony of the apostles, it is necessary to be assured that they were not deceived. This is an essential point in every case of testimony,

\* The objection which has been sometimes made to the fact of the resurrection, from the circumstance of our Lord not having appeared to the whole nation of the Jews, is so highly unreasonable, that I am satisfied it cannot, for a moment, weigh with any person who calmly reflects upon it. The demand which it implies is indefinite, the Jewish nation comprehending many who had never seen Jesus, or who had paid to him little attention. Even they who were in the practice of listening to his discourses, and of frequenting the places to which he usually resorted, were not so well qualified as his most intimate friends to recognise his person. Accordingly, supposing he had shown himself to the Jews, and that they had testified that he did so, still their testimony would have been estimated by the testimony of those who were most familiar with him ; without their support, it would have been so little entitled to credit, that there would have been the strongest ground to suspect that the people had been deluded by

because, if any doubt remain with respect to it, the honesty of those who give the testimony may be admitted, while their evidence is disbelieved.

In the case of the apostles, it can be shown most convincingly that they could not be deceived about the reality of their Master's resurrection.

They solemnly declared to the world that they very frequently saw Jesus after he was restored to life ; that they conversed with him ; and that he remained upon earth for forty days before he ascended to heaven, during which period he associated with them as he had formerly done, imparting to them much interesting knowledge, and delivering many important directions for regulating their future conduct, as teachers of his religion. They declared that he took every method to satisfy them that he was really their Master ; that he recalled to their minds those intimations of his death which he had given to them before he suffered, alluding to circumstances with which no one else could be acquainted ; and that, when he heard that Thomas, one of the twelve, suspended his belief, he permitted him to examine the marks left by the nails with which he had been fixed to the cross ; and to put his hand to the scar made by the spear, with which, to remove all doubts about his being actually dead, his side had been pierced. If all this account be true, that is, if there were really such interviews with a person who affirmed that he was Jesus who had been crucified, and such opportunities

an impostor. As, then, the testimony of the apostles must have determined the value of any more remote testimony, it is evident that, provided this be sufficient, it is useless to regret the want of what must have leaned upon it ; or, which is the same thing, it follows that this testimony was the most proper which could have been given, to establish future generations in the faith of the resurrection.

of identifying his person, it is absolutely impossible that the apostles could have the smallest doubt whether this person was their Master. They had lived with Jesus for several years ; they knew his appearance, his voice, his manner, his opinions ; and can it be imagined that they would be unable to distinguish between him and one who was altogether a stranger to them ! Every man may judge of this by supposing himself placed in a similar situation. If a most intimate friend who had recently died should be restored to life, whatever amazement might be excited when he first appeared, there could be no difficulty in determining whether it was he, more especially if we saw him every day, and lived with him for a considerable time in the closest habits of intimacy. By considering the matter in this light, it becomes apparent that the apostles, if we admit that they were sincere in their account, could not have believed that Jesus rose, if this never happened.

But there is another proof that there could be no deception. If Jesus was not restored to life on the third day, as they said, his body must, on that day, have been either in the possession of the apostles, or of their enemies. In the former case, the most sceptical cannot doubt that the apostles knew that he was still dead ; in the latter, even granting that they had before been somehow unaccountably mistaken, their mistake would have been completely removed the moment that they announced it, because the rulers and pharisees, who were most eager to extirpate Christianity, would have triumphantly produced the body.

Whatever, then, with a view of diminishing the credibility of testimony for supernatural events, may have been said about a propensity in human nature to believe in what is marvellous, a subject which I shall



have occasion particularly to examine in the course of this work, or about the fascinating influence of enthusiasm, through which, they who feel it are persuaded that they see miracles when no miracles are wrought, it does not, in the most remote manner, apply to the case of the apostles ; because, if the resurrection never took place, they must have known so ; and they must, therefore, upon that supposition, be regarded as men who had resolved to deceive others, by publishing, as a fact, what they themselves believed to be false. The absurdity of this I proceed to show in the next Chapter.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE APOSTLES DID NOT INTEND TO DECEIVE OTHERS.

IT being thus evinced that the apostles could not be themselves deceived about the reality of the resurrection, nothing more is necessary for enabling us to appreciate their evidence, or to determine what degree of credit should be attached to it, than to ascertain whether they had any motive for deceiving the world. If it shall appear that, so far from this being the case, they had every motive for not doing so, and that their adherence to the religion of Jesus is, upon the supposition of his having been an impostor, irreconcilable with every principle and disposition of human nature, we may warrantably draw the conclusion, that they spoke the truth when they affirmed that their Master rose from the dead ; and, as a consequence obviously resulting from this, that the Gospel is a Divine revelation.

It tends very much to establish the veracity of the apostles, that they had been themselves much disappointed by the death of Jesus, and must, from the nature of the case, have been completely so, 'if he never rose from the dead. When they first renounced the comforts of domestic life, and the place which they held in society, that they might follow him, they were prepossessed by the idea that, notwithstanding the meanness of his appearance, he was their Messiah ; that at a convenient season he would proclaim his sovereignty, and would confer upon them the most exalted situations in his kingdom. It required the most delicate and continued instruction on the part of Jesus to remove these prejudices, to convince them that his kingdom was not of this world, and to satisfy them that it was necessary to look beyond it for the happiness which was to reward those who were sincerely attached to him.'

But this hope of eternal life which ultimately, in a great measure, reconciled them to the humble condition, and to the poverty in which they were to continue while upon earth, rested entirely upon the divine mission of Jesus, or upon his resurrection ; he himself often told them so ; and indeed it was so evident, that all of them, without any particular information, must have perceived it.

If, then, they saw him, in place of rising from the grave, mouldering into dust, they must have been satisfied that all his promises were deceitful, and that the delightful prospects of future bliss which he had set before them could never be realized. How severe must have been this disappointment ; and with what feelings of indignation would they reflect on the memory of a man who had not only deceived them, but who, by doing so, had led them to renounce all which was most dear to them ? In what manner would men in this si-



tuation naturally act? They could not fail to regret their credulity, and to think with much sorrow on the part which they had acted; they would be eager to hide themselves from those who had been the most frequent witnesses of their delusion; to return to the stations in life which they had abandoned; and to renew the kindly intercourse, which their ill-directed zeal had induced them to suspend.

Accordingly, we find that the apostles did act precisely in this manner. Depressed by the melancholy event of their Master's death, and dreading that he was for ever separated from them, they dispersed, and resumed the professions which for him they had forsaken. And if they thus acted when their hopes were rather shaken than destroyed, is it not natural to conclude, that they would be confirmed in this course of conduct, when they found that what they dreaded had actually happened?

Yet the fact is, if we suppose that Jesus was an impostor, that the apostles most unaccountably departed from this conduct, when they must have been completely convinced of its propriety; for, from the time that their credulity was exposed, and their disappointment certain, their zeal for the honour and glory of Jesus was renewed, and became more ardent than before; they professed to remember him with the most enthusiastic veneration, and they declared that they looked to him for the blessing of God in this world, and for eternal salvation in the next. The most probable account of this change surely is that which they themselves gave, that, at the time which Jesus had mentioned, he did rise from the dead; and, by repeatedly showing himself to them, dissipated the alarm which had shaken their constancy, and fully established them in the belief of his exalted character, and of the

doctrines which he had revealed to them. Unless this was the case, we must believe that they threw aside all regard to what they had just shown to be their own feelings and their own sentiments, at the very time too when every doubt respecting the propriety of these must necessarily have been removed from their minds.

But their veracity will receive additional support, when it is considered that, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, the attempt to persuade men that he did so, must, in their own estimation, have been impracticable.

Their Master, during his continuance upon earth, succeeded in attracting the admiration of many who heard him. His discourses, abounding with the purest and most sublime truths of natural religion, and with maxims of the most elevated morality, delivered also with a dignity which gave energy to reason, were listened to with amazement ; the effect produced by them is strikingly described by one of the evangelists ; the people were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught as one having authority.

To the fascinating influence of the most persuasive eloquence, he added what, upon the supposition of imposture, must be called the most consummate art, for he certainly led the people to believe that he had the command of nature ; effectuating, by a word, what human power, enlightened and directed by human science, would in vain attempt to accomplish ; nay, so admirably did he conduct his scheme, that even the most learned among the Jews, although they were very desirous to detect him, and used every method for doing so, which ingenuity, sharpened by inveterate bigotry and hatred, could suggest, were constrained to acknowledge that he wrought the most stupendous miracles ; insomuch that, after a solemn deliberation upon the subject, they declared that, if they let him alone, all men would follow after him.

Yet what was the result of these numerous and great advantages which he possessed? He failed in converting even those who admired his discourses, and believed in his miracles; the applause with which the multitude at first followed him, was soon silenced by their attachment to what he sought to subvert; and, after a life of the most uninterrupted activity, devoted to the conversion of those to whom he addressed himself, he was apprehended as a malefactor, dragged, amidst the execrations of the people, before a tribunal of justice, and through the importunity, not the evidence of his accusers, and contrary to the avowed conviction and inclination of the Roman governor, before whom the evidence was exhibited, condemned to a death allotted to the vilest of criminals, leaving, as his disciples, only a few illiterate men, little qualified to excite veneration for his memory, or to endear his name to the world.

Here, then, was a striking example how little the most artful imposture, conducted in the most artful manner, could effectuate among the Jews, when that imposture struck at the root of their religion; an example which could not fail to exert its full effect upon the apostles, showing them the vanity of their attempting to accomplish what had baffled the skill of their Master.

Of his superiority to them they were abundantly sensible. They had, from the commencement of their attachment to him, cherished for him the most implicit deference; they submitted all their controversies to his decision; and they had been thoroughly impressed with their inability to perform the miraculous works which he performed, or seemed to perform, when, after in vain exerting themselves to heal a diseased person who, in his absence, had applied to them, they were obliged to desist, and to solicit his interposition.

With these sentiments of their inferiority to Jesus, and with the fatal issue of his attempt directly in their view, it is impossible that they could entertain the smallest hope of succeeding in establishing his religion; or that they could fail to discern the innumerable and apparently insurmountable obstacles which they would have to encounter. Yet they not only resolved to attempt the conversion of their countrymen, they even determined to enlarge the plan, to announce Jesus as the Saviour of the Gentiles, and to publish his gospel amongst the various nations which composed the Roman empire. For carrying into execution this part of their scheme, something more was requisite than even the eloquence or the art of their Master, and which imposture could not feign, an intimate acquaintance with the languages of those nations which they were eager to convert. Without this acquaintance they could not have even commenced their undertaking; and every man who is conversant with the study of languages must admit, that it was a qualification, the acquisition of which they must have found to be accompanied with the most formidable and lasting difficulty.

It may, from all these considerations, be fairly concluded, that the scheme of following out, and of extending the design of Jesus, without any of the advantages which he possessed, and with all of which he was unsuccessful, must have appeared to the apostles impracticable; and if it did so, it is in the highest degree improbable that they would have attempted to carry it into execution. Men who are not absolutely devoid of reason are guided by a regard to what is possible; when there is either the certainty, or the firm belief of failure, labour is justly considered as madness.

If, however, it still be contended, that the apostles have a false testimony, or did not perceive the impracticability of converting the world, their resolution to

engage in this enterprise must be ascribed to enthusiasm, to ignorance of human nature, or to a degree of folly which disregards difficulties, because it has not the penetration necessary for discerning them. But not one of these suppositions can be applied to explain their conduct.

Enthusiasm is, in their case, entirely out of the question. Men are enthusiasts, often, indeed, about what is most absurd, but always about what they themselves believe; whereas it has been shown, that the apostles could not believe in the resurrection if it did not take place. They were therefore so far from being enthusiasts, that they were cool impostors, following out a scheme by means which they must have condemned.

Ignorance of human nature does not account for their conduct, because, however limited we may suppose their acquaintance with it to have been, they were taught, by their Master's fate, that it was no easy matter to give a new direction to the public mind, or to eradicate opinions which had taken the firmest root, and which, in the estimation of the Jews, were sanctioned by the authority of Heaven.

Neither can it be thought that the apostles were weak men, who had not sufficient penetration to discover, that making all mankind the disciples of Christ was a chimerical and impracticable project; for the discourses which they delivered display much soundness of understanding, and much practical wisdom. Many, indeed, of those doctrines and precepts of Christianity, which have exerted the most salutary influence upon the human character, and which are regarded with universal admiration, originated with them, or were first clearly proposed to the world after the death of Jesus.

And even although they had not perceived all the difficulties attending their scheme, still, as this fault in



their perception left these difficulties just as they would have been had they been foreseen, it is evident that the circumstance of these coming unexpectedly upon the apostles would have rendered their effect even more formidable, and would have naturally deterred them from continuing upon ground, which every step showed to be full of snares.

From all, then, which has been stated, it appears, that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, the apostles engaged in a work which they were persuaded no exertion could accomplish. This is a conclusion so repugnant to human nature, and so inconsistent with every dictate of common sense, that nothing but the most decisive proof of their enthusiasm or their insanity can give to it the lowest degree of probability. But neither of these, has it been shown, can be attached to them, and, therefore, their attestation should be regarded as true.

There is additional proof of the veracity of the witnesses for the reality of the resurrection, arising from the nature of the design which they adduced that striking fact to promote.

Whatever had been the nature of the design, and however much the success of it might have contributed to enlarge their influence, or to add to their prosperity, still, if it had been evidently impracticable, there would have been the strongest reason to believe, that men in their senses would not have engaged in it. But the evidence in favour of the apostolic testimony, which I am now to consider, is quite different from the ease or difficulty attending the execution of the design; and the strength of it will be perceived, if it can be established, that the object to be attained by the propagation of Christianity could not gratify any passion, or bring with it any temporal advantage to the apostles, and was not

such an object as would naturally have suggested itself to men of their habits of thinking, or, if it had, not such an one as they would have felt any inclination or zeal to advance.

They declared to the world, that Jesus Christ, agreeably to his own predictions, had been restored to life. Now, they did this for a particular purpose—to convince all who heard them, that they were under the strongest obligations to acknowledge him as their Lord and Master, and to regulate their faith and their practice by the doctrines and precepts which he had delivered; that is, they inculcated upon mankind the necessity of renouncing the errors of superstition and idolatry, of alienating themselves from habits to which the love of pleasure, and numberless other causes, had attached them, and which they had not been accustomed to regard as inconsistent with duty, and of forming their characters upon the example which Jesus had left—an example exhibiting a degree of practical excellence, of which they had before, in all probability, never formed a conception.

In order to inspire the highest reverence for their Master, for him by whom they had themselves been so cruelly deceived, they affirmed that he had conquered death; that he was the Son of God, honoured and commissioned by him; that he had been exalted to unfading glory; that he conducted all things in heaven and in earth, and that he is the Mediator between God and man, in whose name prayers are to be addressed, and thanksgiving offered to the Almighty.

It is plain, from the whole construction of this scheme, that the apostles were not actuated by motives of ambition, in the common sense of that word, nor even influenced by what has been considered as the more refined desire, of being transmitted to future ages as the



authors of a new system of religion ; because, although their labours had been, to the full extent of their wishes, successful, they could have received no immediate honour, and could have been viewed as possessed of no distinguished merit, since they represented themselves as only the instruments of Jesus, deriving all their knowledge, and all their capacity to impress the minds of men, solely from him.

What, then, were they to gain by embarking in this design ? No more than the reputation of being remembered as the servants of one who, they knew, had been guilty of continued fraud, and of the most artful hypocrisy—vices which not only, in the greatest degree, debase those who practise them, but which, when detected, excite in others the most marked sentiments of contempt and detestation. Whether this can be considered as a sufficient reward for what they did, may be easily determined.

It is equally evident, that the apostles had no hope of acquiring wealth. It was the constant subject of their Master's preaching and of their own, that this world should hold a very low place in our affections, and that excessive attachment to it is inconsistent with that elevated piety, and that disinterested generosity which we are formed to acquire ; in short, they endeavoured to destroy the power of those mercenary considerations which so often corrupt the heart, and to expand the noblest feelings which adorn human nature. In perfect harmony with a design so amiable and refined, they never grasped at riches ; they continued, during their ministry, in the same poverty in which they had been before they attached themselves to Jesus, and they even exercised those mechanical employments in which they had been initiated, that they might not be under the necessity of requesting support from the converts, who

would have gladly shared with them the abundance which they enjoyed. It is established by the writings of authors, who, certainly, had no design to applaud the Christians, that the attention of the primitive disciples was directed to objects very different from the accumulation of wealth ; that they even showed an indifference to it, which the particular circumstances in which they were placed rendered very amiable, but which, in the ordinary state of society, it is by no means a duty to cherish.

If, then, Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, it must be admitted that a number of men changed all their habits of life, submitting to incessant, and, as they believed, hopeless labour, for the purpose of representing an impostor as the greatest benefactor of the human race, when they could thus gain nothing which they could hold in estimation, and although there was no motive which could, if they were constituted like other men, even in the slightest degree, incline them to act as they did.

There is another view of the design of Christianity, which, in a different manner, but perhaps no less forcibly and strikingly, confirms the veracity of the apostles.

The desire of extirpating vice, of suggesting the most rational and elevated principles of action, and of removing the numberless evils resulting from the relation in which we stand to one another, must be acknowledged to be the desire of no ordinary minds. It could have originated only with men actuated by the most ardent and comprehensive benevolence, who had thought much upon the constitution of our nature, and who had most accurately investigated the sources of human felicity.

In the writings of the ancient philosophers, there are many noble sentiments respecting the Deity, and many

beautiful and impressive illustrations of the extent and the obligation of virtue. But we know that these men never entertained the enlarged idea of enlightening the world. They confined their wisdom within the narrow circle of their own schools ; and, that they might effectually conceal it from the great part of mankind, they publicly professed to revere what, in private, they ridiculed and despised.

There was in this conduct, after making every allowance for it, a contraction of mind, and an insincerity, which we might have hoped that their progress in science would have removed ; but they seem to have rashly adopted it as an incontrovertible truth, that no efforts could dispel the thickness of intellectual darkness, and rested satisfied with contemning, or with mourning over, the ignorance which they showed more anxiety to perpetuate than to remove.

The apostles of Christ, on the other hand, with moral and religious sentiments more pure and exalted than those which the wisest of the heathen philosophers possessed, rose infinitely superior to the narrow and desponding resolution of confining the happiness which such sentiments are so eminently calculated to impart to all who, after careful examination, have embraced them. They showed, upon every occasion, the most unwearied zeal in accomplishing the reformation, and in ameliorating the condition of mankind. About this fact, whether they were deceivers or not, no one who is acquainted with their history can for a moment doubt.

But was such zeal for such a design naturally to be expected in men taken from the situations in which the apostles were originally placed, and who had continued in these situations till they reached the maturity of life ; or is the scheme of introducing universal righteousness and pure religion, a scheme which can be sup-

posed congenial with their sentiments and their views, and for the execution of which they would make so great sacrifices, as even when they first resolved to attempt it, they undoubtedly did?

The human mind receives its complexion very much from external causes; its range of thought being narrowed or extended, according to the nature of the objects with which it is conversant, and to the means of improvement which it has enjoyed. Every situation in life exerts a peculiar influence upon the dispositions, the wishes, indeed upon the whole character. What to one class of men appears most desirable, and is consequently pursued with unwearied diligence, by another is regarded with indifference; they would not only make no effort to attain it, even although it was almost within their power, but they would find much difficulty in conceiving upon what ground any could hold it in estimation, and feel anxiety to acquire it.

In those stations which require the unremitted exertions of bodily labour, little time is left for abstract reflection, or for the intricate study of human nature. The chief object of such as are placed in them is to be secure themselves against the hardships of poverty, and to make some provision for the establishment and the comfort of those whom the ties of blood have united to them. Among these persons, accordingly, no one expects to find that enlargement of conception, or those general views, which the investigations of philosophy should always, and do often produce. It would be esteemed in the highest degree preposterous to propose to them schemes for enlightening mankind, and for the mere understanding of which there is required a familiarity with subjects and discussions which demand a superiority to common opinions and prejudices, not often to be found, even in the higher classes of the

community, because it is founded upon the most thorough knowledge of the causes by which alone the essential improvement of such a being as man can be promoted.

Applying these general observations to the case of the apostles, we shall be led to conclude, that the sublime principles and views of Christianity are not those to which they would have naturally directed their attention, or to which, although they had been placed before them by others, men in their situation would have been much disposed to attend.

It is true that, even in the humblest ranks of life, and amongst those who have the fewest inducements to cultivate in a more than usual degree their rational faculties, the energy of genius is sometimes to be traced, they who possess it thinking more liberally than those around them, and approaching even very near to the opinions which the most enlightened have adopted. But it may be safely assumed, as a general truth, that the associations which external circumstances have led men to form, and which have long influenced them, will give a permanent direction to sentiment, and that the exceptions to this will never, at the same time, and in the same class of people, be very numerous.

It might, for example, be conceived, although even this would really be highly improbable, that one fisherman of Galilee, although he had never cultivated literature and philosophy, and although he had, for many years, confined himself to the circle of occupations which his profession marked out to him, might, all at once, from the impulse of universal benevolence, have wished to make his fellow creatures happy; might have become convinced that virtue, in its most extensive sense, would accomplish this; and might, by much reflection, have certainly determined in what that vir-

tue consisted. But a knowledge of human nature must satisfy every man, that he would have in vain attempted to bring over to his views his humble and ignorant companions, the other fishermen with whom he associated ; that to them the scheme, founded on these views, would have been unintelligible, or, at all events, would have appeared a scheme which it would be hopeless in them to attempt to execute.

The inference suggested by these remarks is, that the only rational account which can be given of such men as the apostles engaging in the astonishing work of establishing a new religion throughout the world is, that they believed themselves commissioned for that purpose by divine authority, and that they could not disobey without acting contrary to what they esteemed as the command of God, and, consequently, without forfeiting his favour and approbation. Now, as it has been shown that the apostles could not have believed this unless Jesus really rose from the dead, their conduct can be explained only by acquiescing in the truth of that event.

This conclusion will be much strengthened, by comparing the Christian scheme with the sentiments in which the apostles were educated.

Like other Jews, they cherished the most inveterate hatred to the Gentiles, considering them as entirely alienated from the true God, and forsaken by him. These sentiments they often, during their continuance with Jesus, expressed. What, then, completely changed their opinions, divesting them of their dearest prepossessions, and, all at once, disposing them to embrace, with the most fervent charity, the enemies, as they had reputed them, of their God and of their nation ? The whole tenor of thought cannot be subverted by a slight cause ; and shall it be supposed that this happened to the apostles in consequence of the suggestions of one



whom they knew to be a deceiver ; that to him they sacrificed what their fathers had anxiously instilled into their infant minds, and what had gained strength every day until the period at which it was abandoned ?

The intimations which Jesus sometimes gave, that he was to be the Saviour of all men, and that he was to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, uniformly perplexed them ; to these intimations they had shown the greatest aversion to listen. Can it, then, be imagined, that what thus shocked them, when enforced by him whom they believed to be invested with divine authority, would be eagerly embraced the moment that they were persuaded that this authority never had belonged to him, being thus powerfully recommended to them by what should have produced just the opposite effect, by what should have more firmly rivetted them in their original conviction, and placed an everlasting barrier between them and the Gentile world ?

The human mind has its laws, the operation of which, in ordinary cases, is as unlikely to be interrupted, as the operation of those laws of nature which regulate the system of the universe. Although, therefore, it is unquestionably true that men may, and often do utter falsehood, yet there are situations when falsehood is morally impossible, and when, unless we suppose the whole fabric of our nature to have undergone a revolution, truth must be spoken.

But if, notwithstanding all this, it be still thought that the apostles derived from their own reflection the enlarged views which they possessed, or adhered to them without any belief of their being the dictates of inspiration, thus much, it would seem, must be granted, that their moral perceptions were exquisitely acute, and that they must have had the strongest zeal for the promotion of piety, when they undertook so difficult a work



to secure the triumph of virtue, and to establish the principles of a purer religion. If this, however, was the case, and if it was not, no account, supposing them to be impostors, can be given of their appearing as teachers, in what manner shall it be reconciled with a great part of what they taught?

They blended the most sublime truths with the strangest falsehoods; they suggested the most striking motives for the conscientious discharge of duty; these motives deriving all their force from the truth of what they knew to be the fiction of imagination; they spent a great part of their lives in unwearied efforts to delude mankind, and were guilty of what, to them, who certainly thought most justly of God, must have appeared the most shocking profaneness. They laid it down as the fundamental principle of their system, without the acknowledgment of which they admitted none into the society which they formed, that the Almighty had given a divine mission to a man who they were certain had no such mission; that this man, whose body was corrupting in the tomb where it had been deposited, had been raised from the dead, and had ascended to heaven; that he had been honoured in higher regions as the Saviour of the human race, and had been constituted the Judge to whom all who have ever lived are, on the great day of retribution, to render an account of their actions.

What can be conceived more wicked and more blasphemous, than these declarations, if they who made them were assured that they had no foundation in truth? Yet they were published for the sole design of promoting the glory of God, by increasing the number of those who honoured and obeyed him; they were published by men who zealously inculcated the sacred obligation of the most undeviating integrity; and who uniformly represented falsehood, even in the best of causes, as meriting the indignation of heaven.

There was thus, in the character of the apostles, upon the supposition of their giving a false testimony, a junction of the most exalted virtue, and the most consummate depravity ; an union most unnatural, the existence of which it is difficult to conceive. The best men may be led by the violence of passion to do what is wrong, but their virtuous principles, aided by returning reflection, will regain their ascendancy, and, in a generous mind, will even be strengthened by the recollection of error. But no good man can coolly practise wickedness ; he who does so, must have been long habituated to it. Yet, as this happened in the case of the apostles if they deviated from truth, we must reverse our opinion of their high regard to duty, and class them with the abandoned and the worthless. Such an idea of them, however, even the enemies of Christianity may hesitate to adopt ; because it is impossible to reconcile it with the doctrine which they taught ; a doctrine, which not only tends to improve the human character, but which has, in fact, often improved it ; which has given rise to the noblest displays of virtue ; and which has, in every succeeding age, purified the heart, producing that inflexible regard to principle, which cannot be contemplated by any moral being without admiration.

If, then, it be supposed that the resurrection never took place, there arise inextricable difficulties, which must strike all who are in any degree acquainted with the history of man. On the contrary, if, laying aside that supposition, we adhere to the account given by the historians of our Lord, and by his apostles, the conduct of the first teachers is exactly what, in their circumstances, might have been expected, and their testimony receives a degree of credibility which should most rationally determine our belief.

It has indeed been urged, and urged too with the intention of indirectly undermining the testimony of the apostles, that there have been many instances of men, who, although most scrupulously upright in the usual intercourse of life, have not hesitated, in the view of promoting what they esteemed a good cause, to depart from integrity; having, without reluctance, had recourse to what, by a strange abuse of language, has been denominated a pious fraud, to cheat men into that which it seemed their interest or their duty to believe.

The fact must be admitted; and it is a fact very strikingly illustrating the weakness and the inconsistency of man; but the inference which is intended to be drawn from it by no means follows. The whole tenor of Christianity is in decided opposition to this practice; the apostles, as was observed, reprobated it; and it is not usual for men broadly, and without disguise, to inculcate what casts infamy upon themselves. But laying this out of the question, it may be answered, that between the case of the apostles, and the case of those who have thus acted, there is not the slightest similarity. The monk, who strives to gain credit for the ridiculous miracles of saints, or of those whom he represents as such, either is himself deceived, believing that he thus directly promotes the cause of religion, or what, in his estimation, equally advances the honour of God, that he will increase the influence of the order to which he belongs; or he has in view to add to the wealth of his community, and thus to secure the luxurious indulgence which the garb of austerity has been too often employed to hide. But the apostles of Jesus, as has been so often stated, knew that what they announced was false, and could hope for no advantage from their exertions. In one word, they sought, by deceit, to establish what they were convinced was impious,

and thus to endanger, not merely the temporal prosperity, but the everlasting salvation of all who embraced their doctrine. They could not, therefore, screen themselves under the justification which has been insidiously suggested for them, for they must have condemned their own conduct, and, consequently, all the difficulties attending the idea of imposition remain in full force.

But the veracity of the apostles is placed beyond a doubt, when, to the strong confirmation of it already adduced, it is added, that, by giving their testimony, they exposed themselves to the most shocking sufferings, and that all of them who were called to do so, submitted, without hesitation, to death itself, rather than retract what they had taught.

The Christian religion was introduced into the world amidst the most violent persecution. It is recorded by profane, as well as by sacred writers, that its great Author, after leading a life embittered by the most malignant calumny, and the most inveterate and wanton imposition, was ignominiously crucified; and it is no less certain, that his immediate disciples endured much anguish on account of their adherence to him. As his religion overturned the fondest hopes of his countrymen, all who professed it were detested as the enemies of the Jewish nation; and the apostles had thus, as their first sacrifice, to renounce the friendship of those to whom they were most tenderly attached, breaking the endearing connexions which give to life its sweetest joy.

And they cast themselves upon a world little disposed kindly to receive them. They had to struggle with power, armed against them by bigotry and hatred; and they could look only for that continued wretchedness from which human nature must ever shrink.

This dismal prospect had been fully set before them by their Master. He had uniformly told them, that, in

the world they would have tribulation ; that, as he himself often had not where to lay his head, so it would be with them ; that, for his sake, they would be dragged before rulers and governors to be buffeted and scourged, and that they would even be regarded with so much detestation, that it would be esteemed an act of piety to put them to death.

These, surely, were not encouraging declarations ; they must, at least, have damped zeal, even in the best of causes ; and they could not fail to extinguish all desire of carrying on a scheme of deceit which was to be attended with such melancholy and revolting consequences to those who engaged in it.

Little need be said to show that happiness is the object which all men wish to attain ; that, misery, although it must often be endured, is what they eagerly seek to avoid. The dread of pain influences, in a greater or a less degree, every mind ; and the love of life clings so fast about the heart, that nothing but the unceasing torture of the most depressing wretchedness can tear it from us.

Yet, if we suppose that Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, the conduct of the apostles was in direct contradiction to these obvious and universal laws of our nature. In support of what they knew to be false, and of what they knew could bring to them no advantage, and could gratify no passion, they resolved to submit with patience to every variety of suffering. They preferred to the peaceful and innocent enjoyment of life, the hatred, the scorn, and the cruelty of mankind ; and they chose to encounter death in those shocking forms, from which even imagination revolts with horror.

The history of the Christian church does no doubt transmit to us the names of many who endured sufferings equally severe with those of the apostles, rather



than renounce opinions which all perceive to have originated from the most infatuated weakness, and to be marked with the wildest absurdity. But still these men believed in such opinions, considered it as their duty to adhere to them, and were even persuaded that if, by the application of force, they were induced to abjure them, they would draw down upon themselves the divine vengeance in this life, and would be plunged into everlasting misery in the next.

However, then, we may pity such aberrations of reason, and deplore that such mistaken views of religion should ever have prevailed, still we must admit the sincerity of those who entertained them ; and could we separate the principle upon which they acted, from the absurdity of the action to which it led them, we would admire the heroic intrepidity with which they submitted to the agony of a violent death, rather than depart from what they believed to be right.

But from the case of these men we cannot argue to that of the apostles, because they suffered, not on account of opinions which, from the fallible judgment of those who professed them, might be erroneous, and which, at all events, no external conduct could prove to be otherwise, but on account of what they announced as a fact which had fallen under the observation of their senses, about which there could be no mistake, and no misapprehension. If, therefore, the resurrection of their Master never took place, they sealed with their blood what all of them were convinced was false.

But is this a line of conduct which, even in the general view which has been taken of it, appears conformable to nature? Can it be supposed that a number of men, for the sake of gaining credit to an unprofitable imposture, would submit to what has so often drawn aside from duty even the virtuous, and to what, when

it has been endured in the cause of truth, has most deservedly ennobled the characters of those who endured it, and transmitted their memory with honour to succeeding ages?

There are, however, some circumstances attending the sufferings of the apostles, which very much increase the force of this argument.

Had nothing more been handed down to us than that they underwent persecution rather than retract a falsehood connected with a scheme not calculated to gratify avarice or ambition, it might have been imagined, that they had inadvertently advanced so far in the fraud that they could not safely retreat, and, consequently, that they suffered, not from any determined resolution to do so, but because they found it impossible to escape from suffering. The fact that they were warned of their fate completely destroys this supposition; and, indeed, their whole history, and the history of those who opposed them, place it beyond a doubt, that their sufferings were entirely voluntary; or that, with the utmost ease, they might have avoided them.

The religion which they taught in the name of Jesus, struck so fatal a blow at the affluence and authority of the chief men in Judea, that they would most gladly have adopted any method to show that it was false. We know, certainly, that, for this purpose, they had recourse to the terror of punishment; but they would have unquestionably preferred, as the much more effectual, and the less odious mode, prevailing, through bribery, with some of those who were accessory to the fraud, to lay it open to the world.

How great would have been their triumph could they have satisfied their countrymen that Jesus, the report of whose resurrection had excited universal attention, and produced a very powerful effect upon the



public mind, was in his tomb, and how well would they have conceived their rewards and honours to be bestowed upon those who made to them a discovery, in itself most important, but which, to them, from their particular situation, was in the highest degree interesting. The apostles, then, had not only at all times an opportunity of drawing back, and of thus shunning the dreadful fate which, with exquisite cruelty, was preparing for them, but of drawing back, with the utmost advantage to themselves, with the certainty of procuring that wealth or that distinction, the hope of which had originally dazzled their minds, and had formed the first tie which united them to Jesus.

And the applause which would have been lavished on them would not have been poisoned by any reproach of conscience for the part which they had acted, because it was virtuous to unmask villany, stopping the progress of opinions which, however admirable when abstractly considered, were, from the manner in which they were announced, to introduce confusion and wretchedness; and it was humane to preserve their fellow creatures from a delusion which at once tore the father from his family, which gave to him other cares than those which natural affection assigned to him, which certainly exposed him to persecution, to insult, and to poverty, and which, in all probability, was to shorten his days by the pangs of the cross, or the flames of the stake.

Yet, notwithstanding all these motives, the most powerful which can influence the mind, and which might have secured detection, although no hardship, or no self-denial had been the consequence of maintaining the imposture, not one of the twelve, or of those who said that they had seen Jesus after he rose from the grave, was ever induced to retract his declaration. The constancy of them all was proof against what might

have shaken the firmest courage, against those depressions of spirit which all men occasionally feel, and, through which, what in happier moments had been contemplated without apprehension or terror, enervates and unhinges the soul.

This resolute and steady adherence to what they testified, was displayed by men not initiated in the maxims of philosophy, not accustomed to speculations which tend to render the mind superior to the agony of the body, but taken from those humble classes of society upon which the dread of corporal punishment produces the strongest effect.

And in what manner did they actually bear their sufferings, and resign themselves to death? Not with the timidity to be expected in men who were conscious that they had justly incurred whatever punishment could be inflicted upon them, or with that sullen and hardened indifference which, in the case of imposture, was all which even fortitude could inspire; but with the utmost cheerfulness and alacrity. In the moments of their bitterest anguish, their love to him, upon whose account they were suffering, seemed to acquire increased fervour, and gave an energy to their minds which enabled them not only to remain unshaken, but to triumph over pain, and to conquer death.

Much of what they suffered was endured in private, in the solitude of a dungeon, or in a state of banishment from all who felt any interest in their fate. In these cases they could not be stimulated by the desire of acquiring the admiration of the multitude, or, from mistaken notions of glory, be impelled to what, without this, they must have viewed with terror. And when they were publicly brought to execution, when they had arrived at that awful period at which the world had lost for them its charms and its influence, when

the severity of justice usually relents, and pity is felt even for the worthless, the spectators of their sorrows, far from being moved to tenderness by their shocking fate, loaded them with reproach, which innocence, indeed, might have despised, but which must have agonised men before wounded with the consciousness of guilt.

What too, independently of the feelings excited by the harshness of others, must have been the state of their own minds at the hour of death? Hopes, if they ever had any, were at that time certainly dissipated; and they had to cast their eyes towards eternity, into which a few moments were to convey them. Eternity, to the most thoughtless, is awful, and by the best it is viewed with some degree of solicitude. With what horror, then, would it naturally be regarded by them, who had, by the most blasphemous imposture, forfeited its blessings, and who had used every effort to estrange their countrymen from a revelation which even they themselves were convinced had proceeded from God?

Yet, so far from thus viewing it, they beheld it with transport; they uniformly spoke of it as bringing to them the noblest reward for their labours; the approach of it elevated their souls; they addressed themselves to God with the trust and confidence of men who believed that they had secured his favour; and their last words were intended to convey to the astonished multitude some faint conception of that happiness which awaited the faithful in what they called their Master's kingdom.

The intrepidity of Socrates, who calmly drank the poison which the injustice of his countrymen had decreed to him, has, most justly, excited the admiration of all who are acquainted with the life of that most distinguished philosopher. It arose from the conviction

that he was acting as he ought ; and that, by yielding obedience, under such circumstances, to the supreme authority of his country, he was setting an example of submission which might, in a very high degree, improve the national character. The apostles exhibited intrepidity at least equal, probably superior, even to his, at the very time when, if they looked into their own bosoms, they must have been humbled with shame, and stung by remorse.

But can it be believed that a number of men would be thus infatuated, of men, too, who, so far from being devoid of religion, had been most carefully educated in the faith of it ; who professedly retained that faith, and who having published the most rational sentiments respecting the immortality of the soul, had only to look into that pure law which they had announced to the world as the invariable rule of Divine judgment, to be satisfied that, if there was a God, they could expect nothing but the severity of his vengeance.

Every man, from his own observation and experience, may determine for himself upon the improbability of such conduct. Let him reflect whether any twelve men with whom he is acquainted, far less twelve men selected from the lowest stations of society, would, from choice, lead a life of suffering, and submit to a most excruciating death ; would, with the firm conviction that they were guilty of the most heinous offences against the Supreme Being, at a time when all men, however life has been spent, are disposed to be serious and sincere, speak with tranquillity of approaching admission into the divine presence, and this for the sake of promoting an imposture which, they were persuaded, could never be promoted. I think that the matter has only to be placed in this light to satisfy the most incredulous, that, upon the supposition of the falsehood of their

testimony respecting the resurrection, the whole conduct of the apostles is irreconcilable with human nature, and is, therefore, upon those principles which we must employ to determine belief, in the utmost degree incredible.

It becomes thus reasonable to adopt the only account which illustrates that conduct, in other words, to give credit to their own assertion, that they were so thoroughly convinced that their Master had risen from the dead, and that it was thus their duty, as it would ultimately be their happiness, to adhere to him, faithfully executing the commission, which, after his resurrection, he had entrusted to them, that they could not, even for a moment, hesitate to devote themselves to the propagation of his religion, although they were perfectly aware that by doing so, they would have to endure what was, in itself most formidable ; would see the pleasures and the joys of life to them for ever blasted, and would all be exposed to persecution, and many of them to an unnatural and cruel death.

This account explains most satisfactorily what were the motives which determined their minds. According to it, their conduct ennobles human nature, while it is in perfect harmony with it ; was just such conduct as every truly good man in the same circumstances would find himself obliged in conscience to adopt.

But the argument acquires additional strength, when the preceding conduct of the apostles is brought into view.

The gentleness and condescension of Jesus had completely gained their affections ; they had no doubt that he really wrought miracles ; and upon one remarkable occasion they made an unequivocal confession of their belief. After an interesting and affectionate discourse, which, not long before he suffered, he delivered to

them, they, with one voice, said, now thou speakest plainly, we know that thou comest forth from God.

Yet, notwithstanding this faith, of the reality of which there cannot be the slightest doubt, no sooner did the enemies of Jesus come forth with an armed force to seize him, than they were intimidated. The greater part of them instantly forsook him ; and when he came into the hall of judgment, he was accompanied only by that one who had made the most earnest, and, as he believed, sincere professions of zeal, not having scrupled repeatedly to affirm, that although all the rest should deny him, he would die with him.

But, even with all this to strengthen him, his intrepidity was unequal to the trial. When he beheld the awful solemnity of the court before which his Master appeared, and the cruelty which was exercised against him ; when he thought that he himself might instantly experience the same barbarous treatment, and might be consigned to the death which was to be inflicted upon Jesus, his mind was overpowered. The open manliness, and the energy of his character were destroyed, in so much that, when the persons who were standing near him insinuated that he was a disciple, he denied that he had ever seen his Lord ; and when he was more closely urged, he did not hesitate to swear that he knew not the man.

Even after a look from Jesus, by recalling the events of happier times, and by irresistibly placing before him his meanness and insincerity, filled him with confusion and remorse, his spirit dissolved in weakness. He did not repair his error, and vindicate his attachment to his Master, by resolutely declaring, that he believed him to be the Son of God, by bearing testimony to the purity and virtue which so eminently distinguished



him, or by imploring that he might be in the same condemnation, but he went out and wept bitterly.

Yet these very men, who had shown so much pusillanimity, whose love of life had borne down principle and attachment, and religious faith, in a very short period openly avowed their reverence for Jesus, and their conviction that he was the Messiah of the Jews, and the Saviour of the world. They did so in the presence of those judges and magistrates, before whom they would have lately trembled; they argued with them in defence of their ministry, and listened with undaunted resolution to the threatenings by which their enemies hoped again to alarm them, and which the melancholy and recent fate of Jesus too certainly showed them would be soon carried into execution. These men did actually endure, with unfailing patience, every combination of wretchedness which barbarous ingenuity could devise; never felt the slightest emotions of terror; never entertained the idea of retracting their testimony, that they might escape from danger; and, even in the immediate contemplation of death itself, placed before them, too, when with undecayed faculties they could survey its horrors, they possessed a degree of composure and serenity, enjoyed by very few who, in the course of nature, and from the attack of ordinary disease, go down to the grave.

There was here, then, a revolution in their principles of action, no less striking than that revolution in their opinions, to which I had occasion to advert. Such a complete change in their mode of acting, any person who has studied human nature, or who has reflected upon his own feelings, must readily admit to be very astonishing, and he will perceive that it cannot be accounted for without referring it to the operation of some powerful cause.



That calm and rational disregard of danger, which is distinguished by the appellation of fortitude or courage, although it implies an effort of the understanding, does not depend altogether upon the mind, at least the ease or difficulty of exerting it, is very much influenced by the bodily constitution.

For example, two men may form the same judgment about what constitutes their duty, may be equally convinced, that it is not only right in a particular situation to suffer for the truth, but that the greatest happiness will ultimately result from thus suffering, and yet these men, if brought to the trial, might act very differently. The one might illustrate by his practice, what he had in theory approved, firmly bearing suffering, while the other, with his persuasion unaltered, might be so affected, as to shrink from it. This conduct would be universally, and very justly attributed to his physical constitution, which, through the inexplicable connexion between body and mind, does powerfully influence the latter; and from such a proof of the strength of its agency upon him, he would not be thought a likely person, in the same circumstances, to evince courage. But if he ever, at some future period, actually did so, no one, acquainted with his history, could hesitate to ascribe his resolution to some very strong motive, or to consider that resolution as most decisively establishing his sincerity.

Let these observations be applied to the case of the apostles. They had undoubtedly determined to die with their Master; they thought it their duty to do so; they often professed their resolution to do it; and Peter was so confident upon this point, that when Jesus, with his accustomed benevolence, sought to dissuade him, he employed the most striking language to signify his determination. Yet they were all intimidated, and

were so ill prepared for meeting the severity of trial, that they committed a most degrading crime to escape from it. They did, however, within a very few weeks, encounter suffering with the most heroic resolution, viewing without emotion what had so violently agitated them. It is surely, then, natural to suppose, that their principles had somehow been more deeply impressed upon their minds, and that their faith in Jesus, which should have always led to the same conduct, but had not been sufficiently powerful for that purpose, had acquired increased strength.

But what, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, was the precise state of the case. They displayed this courage when mental fortitude, or that resolution which arises from the consciousness of rectitude, had ceased. The change in their conduct was accomplished by what should have had quite a different effect, by what should have satisfied them of their prudence, or at least of their good fortune, in having declined to die with their Master, and should have determined them to submit to no more inconveniency upon his account, by producing absolute conviction, that through their credulity they had been engaged in a bad cause, to which it would be criminal, and even impious, any longer to avow an attachment.

If, therefore, the resurrection never happened, there is no sufficient account, no account at all, indeed, of one of the most wonderful facts which occurs in the history of the human mind ; the transition so rapidly made by the apostles from the excess of timidity, to cool, steady, and long continued fortitude ; nay, this singular resolution must be ascribed to what every person may be sensible ought, according to every principle in our nature, to have proved a complete security against it.

The fact, then, that men who drew back from suffering, when they believed suffering to be their duty, were afterwards reconciled to it, adds to the proof of their sincerity arising from the mere circumstance, that they endured persecution rather than retract their testimony, because it shows, that the strongest reluctance had been surmounted; reluctance, the removal of which, in the case of the apostles can, I may now affirm, be imputed only to their conviction of the divine mission of their Master, that is, to faith in his resurrection, or, what cannot be admitted by any who do not believe in that event, to the strength which, according to his promise, he imparted to them after he ascended to heaven.

And it may be observed, in confirmation of what has been said, that the apostles, even after they began to suffer with intrepidity, showed the same aversion to suffering, when viewed separately from the end for which they submitted to it, which like other men they had originally entertained. They did not, like many enthusiasts, whose extravagance the history of the church has recorded, court injury, and provoke persecution; they uniformly shunned both when they could do so consistently with their duty. There is not one example of their inflicting torture upon themselves, that they might gain the applause of men, and receive the homage which, upon such grounds, the stupidity of superstition has often paid; but they were guided by the most reasonable motives. St. Paul has in fact expressed those natural sentiments, respecting their situation, which must arise in the breast of every dispassionate man who considers it. If in this life only, he writes to some Christian converts, we have hope, we are of all men the most miserable; thus showing that he was fully sensible of the absurdity of his conduct if he was engaged in a scheme of imposture, and consequently in

the strongest manner, though indirectly, confirming what has been proved, that nothing but unfeigned attachment to Jesus could have led him, or those who acted as he did, to encounter the perils which stood in the way of all who professed themselves to be Christians, but which necessarily presented their most formidable aspect to such as were the teachers of Christianity.

I have thus endeavoured, by a variety of considerations, fully to establish the veracity of the Apostles, or what I had more directly in view, the truth of their testimony respecting the resurrection of Jesus Christ ; and, before I leave this branch of the subject, I shall shortly sum up what has been said.

If the resurrection never took place, as the falsehood of their assertions must have been certainly known to those who declared that they were the witnesses of that event, their continuing to profess their belief in Jesus as the messenger of heaven, and the Saviour of the world, implies, that a number of men who had been much deceived, and most cruelly disappointed, became, in consequence of that disappointment, fervently attached to the memory of the man who had deceived them. It also implies that with the avowed design of promoting his honour, and of procuring for him the love, the veneration, and the gratitude of mankind, they engaged in an undertaking which, to persons possessed of their measure of judgment, must have appeared impracticable ; that they ascribed to this teacher, doctrines which would not naturally have suggested themselves to men in their situation of life, which subverted those opinions and sentiments which from infancy they had been taught to revere, and to which, conceiving them to be sanctioned by divine authority, they were most firmly attached, even when they believed in the divi-

nity of their master ; that, rather than renounce this scheme of imposture, the success of which could be attended with no benefit to them, and could only give currency to what in their hearts they must have detested as impious, they patiently submitted to the most dreadful tortures, and even voluntarily exposed themselves to death, with the composure and joyful anticipation which would have been natural only if their pretensions had been well founded ; and to sum up the whole, that they acted with this astonishing degree of fortitude and resolution, although they were constitutionally timid, and had been betrayed by that timidity into conduct which, when they reflected upon it, they severely condemned.

If there be any man who sees no difficulty in admitting all this, or in reconciling it with human nature, he must be allowed to believe that the apostles were impostors, and that the resurrection of Christ was devised by them for the purpose of deceiving the world, or rather for no purpose whatever. But I cannot persuade myself that any one who looks into his own bosom, and who endeavours from consciousness, or from experience, to investigate those radical principles, which must, while we are men, influence and determine our conduct, will hesitate to admit, that if, under all the circumstances which have been stated, the disciples of Jesus gave a false testimony respecting the resurrection, they acted in a manner subversive of every law of the mind, and that the supposition of their giving such a testimony overthrows every ground of belief, and involves us in inextricable perplexity.\*

\* If the doctrine laid down by Mr. Hume, in his celebrated Essay on Miracles, be well founded, all the above reasoning is totally unnecessary. His object is to show, that no degree of

I do not say that the miracle, in the case of their giving a false testimony, is greater than the miracle of the resurrection, because this does not appear to me to be an accurate mode of speaking, or to throw any real light upon the subject. But it certainly may be said,

evidence can afford any ground for a rational belief in miracles, because uniform experience having established the laws of nature, there arises from this circumstance a complete proof that there can be no deviation from these laws. There is no doubt that the historical assumption is too general; but admitting it to be correct, the inference which he deduces from it, and which he constantly assumes as an axiom, is far from being intuitively evident. That events contrary to the laws of nature are possible to the Supreme Being, is unquestionable; indeed we can see no reason why different laws might not have been prescribed, or why the laws which he has actually appointed might not have been differently applied; why, for instance, the senses might not have given to us different ideas from those which they now convey. This being the case, all that Mr. Hume was entitled to infer from the prior permanency of the laws of nature was only this, that, circumstances remaining the same, it was not likely that there would be any suspension or alteration of these laws. This is surely probable, but it is no more; and if a change of circumstances can be supposed to have taken place, the validity even of this inference is weakened or destroyed. Through the whole essay, Mr. Hume labours to represent a doubtful conclusion as sufficient to counteract the effect of what all may know to be a law of our constitution, an inclination to assent to unexceptionable testimony, a law not resting its authority upon reasoning, but instituted by the Supreme Being, and discovered by experience, although experience does not, as Mr. Hume supposes, create it. That, agreeably to this law, assent to sufficient testimony is more reasonable than, upon the strength of what is merely a probable inference from fact, to pay no regard to such testimony, seems apparent; and the truth is, that the plausibility of Mr. Hume's Essay arose, not from the strength of the argument, but from the dexterity with which a doubtful principle was held forth, as admitting of no doubt, and as entitled to more regard than prin-



that they who reject the testimony of the apostles, are so far from having any cause to triumph over the credulity of those who think differently from them in this matter, that they are, in fact, themselves by much the more credulous of the two, for they hold an opinion which they cannot pretend to free from difficulties, and which their own consciousness, and knowledge of

ciples upon which mankind have always acted, and must constantly act. I have not alluded, however, to Mr. Hume's Essay, with any view of fully confuting it upon general principles, that is unnecessary after Dr. Campbell's masterly dissertation upon the subject, but only to observe, that, upon the principles of the Essay, the falsehood of the apostles' testimony is incredible. That testimony was given under circumstances the most peculiar; under these circumstances falsehood had never been experienced; and it would have been contrary to all the laws of mind, which are as much laws of nature as those which regulate the material world. It is vain to urge, that experience has often shown to us, that men depart from what is true; this is not the point; the thing to be considered is, whether, in this particular situation, they ever did so. Experience daily shows us, that diseases may be removed; the works of Jesus, therefore, were miracles, not from the action, but from the manner in which it was performed; and, in the same way, the false testimony of the apostles is a miracle, not because they told a falsehood, but because they did so when, according to every principle in human nature, truth must have been spoken. Now, if their false testimony be thus a miracle, it must share the fate of all other miracles, it must be disbelieved. But they affirmed either what was true or what was false; if they did not attest a falsehood, they must have attested a truth, and we are in this way brought to acquiesce in the reality of the resurrection. Thus may we deduce from Mr. Hume's principles contradictory conclusions, a sufficient proof that the principles are hastily assumed, and plainly evincing, what I have attempted to show, that the only ground upon which any thing affirmed to be a fact, provided it be not obviously impossible, can be admitted or rejected, is the sufficiency or defect of the testimony by which it is supported.

human nature, two of the clearest lights which can direct us, evince to be most improbable. On the other hand, they who attach credit to the testimony of the apostles, follow out, or rather act in conformity to a general law of the constitution, which uniformly influences them in the conduct of life ; that is, they yield their assent to testimony bearing stronger marks of truth than belong to any of those testimonies which are universally regarded, even by those who deny the resurrection, as, upon every subject not connected with religion, affording a sufficient foundation for belief.

I would just farther observe, that the rejection of the testimony of the apostles, involves in it assent to these propositions ; that the Almighty, who has given us reason and perception, and who is the source of all knowledge, cannot make any communication of his will to mankind through the medium of revelation, at least in any other way than by a revelation addressed to every particular person, because it is impossible to furnish any evidence that such a revelation has been actually made ; and that there may have been facts, for this by many unbelievers is not denied, and is, if I recollect, admitted even by Mr. Hume himself, for substantiating which, there is all the evidence which infinite wisdom could afford, and which, nevertheless, mankind, if they act in conformity to reason, ought not to believe.

These are abstract propositions, upon which the understanding of every man may pronounce a decision, propositions so arrogant, and so manifestly absurd, that it is difficult to conceive that two opinions relating to them can exist.

In short, disbelief of the evidence which proves the fact of the resurrection, carries us directly to that hopeless and that irrational scepticism, which, assuming that there is no such thing as truth, or no method of ascertaining what is true, questions even the dictates of

intuition, the foundation of all reasoning, and which, if steadily acted upon, as happily, till we become beings of a different nature, can never be the case, would tear up the base of society, would destroy all confidence in our fellow creatures, and would render the events and the experience of the ages which are past useless to those which are to succeed. Rejection of the evidence for the resurrection may then be classed with disbelief of the information of the senses, of the existence of the material world, and of our own existence ; a degree of infidelity which has been supported with the most admirable ingenuity, but of the reasonableness of which no man, however he may have been perplexed by the arguments which so plausibly and so eloquently defend it, ever was, or, indeed, ever could be convinced.

It must, however, be readily admitted, that the absurdity of disbelieving the testimony of the apostles is not so apparent as that of rejecting the testimony of the senses, because we are not so frequently or so necessarily called to reflect upon the circumstances which evince the absurdity. But it is not on that account the less, if it be true, that no attempt to set aside their testimony has rendered the conduct of the witnesses of the resurrection conformable to the fundamental principles of human nature, or has reduced it to a level with the conduct of those religious impostors, whose motives have been ascertained ; the difficulty of accounting for their perseverance being still left in all its strength. In one word, the evidence that the apostles declared what was true, when they affirmed that their Master rose from the dead, is possessed of whatever could have been desired to render it complete, being as strong as, consistently with free agency, could have been addressed to mankind. It may, therefore, be fairly concluded, that it is most reasonable to acquiesce in it, and to admit the interesting consequence

which follows from its sufficiency, that the Christian religion is a divine revelation.

It will be observed, that I have attempted to establish the veracity of the apostles, without directly alluding to their integrity, or to the general excellence of their characters. Little doubt, indeed, can be entertained, that they exemplified in their lives the sublime morality which they taught, and that, by their mild unassuming virtues, they conciliated the esteem and reverence of those who were converted by their instructions. Had this not been the case, their enemies would have gladly pointed out the contrast between their profession and their practice, and would probably have employed this, as the enemies of Jesus have, not very logically indeed, employed the failings of Christians in later times, to weaken the authority of his religion, from the imperfect degree in which they have conceived it to influence the human mind. As, however, there is no record of their private actions, as the evangelical history exhibits them to us in their public capacity as the ministers of Christ, and as their integrity must thus be inferred from that which, however warranting the inference, they who are inclined to infidelity may assert does not in their estimation do so, I have thrown the consideration of it out of the argument, and have only assumed what no one who reads the New Testament can refuse to admit; that the apostles were possessed of that degree of understanding, which we mean when we speak of common sense, proving, that if this be granted, whatever might have been their notions of integrity, and however they might have been disposed to deceive the world, it is morally impossible that they could have given a false testimony with regard to the resurrection.

But although I have stated the proof in this manner, I am most sensible how important is the amiable-

ness of the apostolic character. To all upon whose minds the general argument has made an impression, or who are disposed to be guided by presumptive evidence, it must appear a delightful confirmation of the truth of Christianity, that the facts upon which it rests have been attested by men who had such high claims to the veneration of mankind, and who, by the magnanimity and generosity of sentiment, which, upon so many occasions they displayed, have furnished to all ages so much reason for concluding, that they uniformly possessed a dignity and an elevation of mind, which must have shrunk with indignation and horror from the debasement of imposture.

## PART IV.

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THERE IS EVIDENCE FOR THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION DERIVED FROM THE SUCCESS WHICH ATTENDED THE PREACHING OF THE APOSTLES, FOUNDED UPON THE FACT THAT CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD.

BEFORE entering upon this part of the evidence, it is necessary to establish the foundation upon which it rests, by exhibiting the proof of the two following facts, that the apostles did extensively diffuse the Christian religion, and did represent the resurrection of Jesus as the foundation upon which the truth of that religion must be placed.

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### CHAPTER I.

THE rapid and extensive propagation of Christianity, in consequence of the preaching of the apostles, is placed beyond a doubt, by the concurring testimony of Christian and Heathen writers. The most minute and accurate account of its progress is found in the scriptural book entitled, the Acts of the Apostles. It appears from



this book, that a few weeks after the Ascension, St. Peter, by one discourse, converted three thousand people in Jerusalem, and that after this, the number of believers in that city very rapidly increased, comprehending not solely men from the lower classes of life, but persons of superior station, and even several who belonged to the priesthood. From the addition daily made to the disciples, the apostles soon found it impossible to discharge all the duties which they had at first performed. They therefore chose to assist them seven men of the most approved reputation, who received the appellation of deacons. One of these was stoned to death by the enraged Jews, an event which proved a signal for the first severe persecution of the church.

Philip, another of the seven, had announced in Samaria the resurrection of Jesus, and having informed the apostles of his success in establishing the belief of the fact, they sent two of their number to give him their assistance. About a year after this event, a very remarkable circumstance in the history of Christianity occurred. Saul, a young man educated in the strictest principles of the Pharisees ; who, consistently with these principles, had upon every occasion shown the most inveterate hostility to the new religion ; who had taken an active part in the murder of Stephen ; and who, to ingratiate himself farther with the powerful men of the nation, had set out for Damascus, a city in Syria, for the express purpose of harrassing the unfortunate Christians who had there taken refuge, was, in the course of his journey, most strikingly, and, as has been so forcibly stated in Lord Littleton's elegant dissertation, miraculously converted. The effect of the impression upon his mind was permanent. He continued, through the remainder of his life, a zealous teacher of the gospel, and he sealed his sincerity by his blood. Having stayed for

a considerable time at Damascus, he went up to Jerusalem, where he became acquainted with some of the apostles, and soon after repaired to Tarsus, his native city, from which he travelled through Cilicia and Syria, convincing numbers that Jesus whom he preached was the son of God, and a messenger from heaven.

Hitherto the teachers of Christianity had addressed themselves only to Jews, but about this period St. Peter having been called to Cesarea, the seat of the Roman governor, admitted into the church Cornelius, a centurion in the imperial army. At Antioch, the capital of Syria, many of the residing Gentiles professed themselves Christians, and the disciples there received this appellation, which, in all subsequent ages, has distinguished the followers of Jesus.

From this city St. Paul, accompanied by Barnabas, went to Seleucia, crossed over to the island of Cyprus, and, having converted the governor, returned to Antioch. But he did not suspend his labours; he after this travelled into Macedonia, preached with much success at Thessalonica, the principal city of that country; went into Greece, and at Athens, the celebrated abode of the purest literature, he delivered, in presence of the philosophers, whose attention he had attracted, a discourse founded upon principles of the most elevated philosophy, converting at the same time Dionysius, a member of the senate of Areopagus. He then directed his journey to Corinth, a city in Greece, distinguished by the wealth, and, what too often accompanies this, the dissoluteness of its inhabitants. Even in it, however, he fixed the religion of Jesus, and founded a Christian church. He went thence to Ephesus, was frequently afterwards in Macedonia, and the other countries which he had formerly visited, but was at length stopped in his progress when at Jerusalem, where he was apprehend-

ed and brought before the Roman governor. Through the intended injustice, or the criminal neglect of this man, he languished for a considerable time in prison, from which he was finally delivered in consequence of his appeal to the Roman emperor. He was, for the purpose of prosecuting this, sent to Rome, where he continued for two years, enlarging the number of Christians in that city.

Here the Acts of the Apostles terminate, comprehending a period, during which, although it did not exceed thirty years from the Ascension, the Gospel was planted, not only in Jerusalem and Samaria, but through the whole of Syria, through Greece and Macedonia, and even in Rome itself, the capital of the world.

The account given by this history of the early propagation of Christianity, is much confirmed by the existence of a number of Epistles, directed to the churches established in the cities mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, and which appear to have been written, some within thirty years, and all of them within forty years after the resurrection. In these epistles there are many allusions to the particular situation of those for whose use they were more immediately composed, to the introduction of Christianity amongst them, and to the circumstances which accompanied its establishment. These different books, if they really belong to the apostolic age, prove incontrovertibly the success of the apostles. Now the Acts possess all those external evidences of being genuine and authentic, which have been shown to be sufficient for establishing the genuineness and authenticity of the Gospels, or of any other ancient production; and, in addition to this, it is apparent from the very nature of the composition, that it never could have acquired authority among Christians, or been regarded as an authentic historical record, if the facts

which it narrates had been without foundation, that is, if there never had been any remarkable conversions in the countries which it specifies, or if no churches had been founded by the apostles.

The Epistles, with one or two exceptions, are supported by the clear attestations of writers from the date of their publication. Those of them which bear the name of St. Paul, were admitted to be his writings even by the enemies of Christianity, and were, on this account, rejected by many of the early heretics, who were much prejudiced against this apostle, from their conceiving him to be peculiarly zealous against the eternal obligation of the Mosaical law—a doctrine to which they were most strongly attached. Indeed it is evident, that, had there been no such churches as those to which they are addressed, they must necessarily have been at once rejected: and if it be granted that there were such churches, all which I am now contending for is proved, that Christianity had been extensively disseminated.

The fact is, as I may just observe in passing, that the original Epistles, agreeably to what might have been imagined, were preserved with the most religious care in the respective churches to which they are directed; and Tertullian, who wrote in the end of the second, or the beginning of the third century, mentions, that these originals were even then in existence. This appears to be the most natural meaning of the expression which he uses, and it is certainly much confirmed by his urging those to whom he was writing to satisfy themselves by consulting them. But whether we adopt this interpretation or not, the genuineness of the epistles is placed beyond a doubt.

The Acts, then, and the Epistles, may be considered as good authority, I am not here entitled to say for the truth of Christianity, but for the rapid and wide diffu-

sion of it ; or, which is in fact the same, for the extensive credit which was given to the reality of the resurrection.

But although it is natural to suppose, that the progress of the Christian religion would be most minutely traced by writers, who, from their conviction of its divine origin, were in the highest degree attached to it, yet it could not establish itself so widely as they represent, without being alluded to by the historians and other writers of the period at which it appeared. Agreeably to this, we find such intimations respecting it, as might have been looked for from those who did not pay to it much attention, and which abundantly confirm the facts mentioned by the inspired writers.\*

\* I make no apology for republishing, in this note, the very important testimonies from Heathen writers, of which I am to make use in the text, because the original works may not be in the hands of some who read this work, and who may be desirous to know how far I have accurately stated their amount ; and because these testimonies not only establish the fact in confirmation of which I here quote them, but they suggest several interesting observations, illustrative of the truth of the resurrection, of which I intend to avail myself in the prosecution of the argument, and the force of which will be most apparent when the passages can be directly consulted.

“ *Judæos, impulsore Christo, assidue tumultuantes, Roma expulit.*”—SÜETONIUS.

“ *Sed non ope humanâ, non largitionibus Principis, aut deûm placamentis, decedebat infamia, quin jussum incendium crederetur. Ergo abolendo rumori, Nero subdidit reos, et quæsitissimis pœnis affecit, quos, per flagitia invisos, vulgus Christianos appellabat. Auctor nominis ejus Christus, Tiberio imperitante, per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum, supplicio affectus erat. Repressaque in præsens exitiabilis superstitio rursûs erumpebat, non modò per Judæam, originem ejus mali, sed per urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrocia, aut pudenda confluunt, celebranturque. Igitur primò correpti qui fatebantur, deinde indicio eorum multi-*

Suetonius, in his life of the Emperor Claudius, alludes to the Christians, and although there is much inaccuracy in what he says respecting them, he renders it

tudo ingens, haud perindè in crimine incendii, quàm odio humani generis, convicti sunt. Et pereuntibus addita ludibria, ut, ferarum tergis coniecti, laniatu canum interirent, aut crucibus affixi, aut flammandi, atque ubi defecisset dies, in usum nocturni luminis urerentur. Hortos suos ei spectaculo Nero obtulerat, et Circense ludicrum edebat, habitu aurigæ permixtus plebi, vel circulo insistens. Unde, quamquam adversus sontes, et novissima exempla meritos, miseratio oriebatur, tamquam non utilitate publicâ, sed in sævitiam unius absumerentur.”—TACITUS.

From this most eloquent and highly affecting description of the tortures inflicted upon the primitive Christians, it will be apparent, that I have not exaggerated in what I have said of the sufferings which many of the apostles, and the first converts were obliged to endure for the sake of their religion.

“Propositus est libellus sine auctore, multorum nomina continens, qui negarent, se esse Christianos aut fuisse, quum præeunte me Deos appellarent, et imagini tuæ, quam propter hoc jusseram cum simulacris numinum afferri, thure ac vino supplicarent; præterea maledicerent Christo, quorum nihil cogi posse dicuntur, qui sunt re vera Christiani. Ergo dimittendos putavi. Alii ab indice nominati, esse se Christianos dixerunt et mox negaverunt: fuisse quidem sed desisse, quidam ante triennium, quidam ante plures annos, non nemo etiam, ante viginti quoque. Omnes et imaginem tuam, Deorumque simulacra venerati sunt, ii et Christo maledixerunt. Affirmabant autem hanc fuisse summam vel culpæ suæ vel erroris, quòd essent soliti stato die ante lucem convenire, carmenque Christo, quasi Deo, dicere secum invicem, seque sacramento, non in scelus aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta, ne latrocinia, ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum appellati abnegarent, quibus peractis, morem sibi discedendi fuisse; rursusque coeundi ad capiendum cibum promiscuum tamen et innoxium; quod ipsum facere desisse post edictum meum, quo secundum mandata tua hetærias esse vetueram. Quo magis necessarium credidi, ex duabus ancillis quæ ministræ dicebantur, quid esset veri, et per tormenta quærere. Sed nihil



plain that, in the time of this emperor, there were many who believed in Christ.

Tacitus, a historian so justly held in the highest estimation, has given a fuller account of Christianity and of its early professors.

Nero, one of the most detestable of the Roman emperors, was raised to the imperial throne about twenty years after the Ascension. In the tenth year of his reign, there happened a dreadful conflagration at Rome. The people, irritated by oppression, and convinced, from the preceding barbarity of the emperor, that he was capable of perpetrating any enormity, ascribed the conflagration to him. Eager to justify himself from this imputation, he, without success, adopted various schemes, and he at length industriously circulated a report, that the fire had been raised by the Christians. To give

*aliud inveni, quam superstitionem pravam et immodicam ; ideòque dilatâ cognitione, ad consulendum te decurri. Visa est enim mihi res digna consultatione, maximè, propter periclitantium numerum. Multi enim omnis ætatis, omnis ordinis, utriusque sexus etiam, vocantur in periculum et vocabuntur. Neque enim civitates tantum sed vicos etiam atque agros superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est, quæ videtur sisti et corrigi posse. Certè satis constat, prope jam desolata templa cœpisse celebrari, et sacra solennia diu intermissa repeti, passimque venire victimas quarum adhuc rarissimus emptor inveniebatur ; ex quo facile est opinari, qua turba hominum emendari possit, si sit pœnitentiæ locus."*

This quotation is the latter part of the ninety-seventh letter in the tenth book of Pliny's Epistles. Had I not been unwilling to extend to a greater length this note, I would, with much pleasure, have subjoined Melmoth's elegant translation of the passage. It is in numerous respects so important a testimony, that every person who is anxious to form an accurate conception of the situation and character of the primitive Christians, should carefully attend to it.

sanction to this atrocious calumny, he inflicted upon those of them whom he discovered the most shocking tortures. Tacitus, being led by mentioning this melancholy fact to speak of the Christians, gives, in the fifteenth book of his *Annals*, this information respecting them, that they derived their name from Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, had been put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, the Procurator in Judea; that the detestable superstition which Christ introduced, after receiving a momentary check, again broke out, not only overrunning the country in which it had originated, but reaching even to Rome; and that, at the period of which he was writing, a great multitude who were attached to it, were, through the information of the few Christians first apprehended, brought to light.

This remarkable passage fully establishes, that the Christian religion had reached Rome by the tenth year of Nero, that is, about thirty years after the Ascension. It is indeed evident from it, that this must have taken place at a much earlier period, for such a number of converts could not have been instantly made, and the people could not have been so universally and so violently prejudiced against the Christians, as Tacitus says they were, and as indeed they must have been, before the idea could have suggested itself to the mind of Nero of imputing to them so monstrous a crime, if they had not been long known, or if the original enmity to them had not been of considerable duration.

The younger Pliny, with whose amiable manners and elegant literature every scholar is familiar, was about seventy years after the Ascension appointed by the emperor Trajan to be governor of Pontus and Bithynia, an extensive province of the empire in Asia Minor. From being placed in this situation, his attention was directed to the Christians, and he has, in one of his letters to

the emperor, given a well known, and a very striking testimony respecting them. He found, when he entered upon the administration of his government, that they were very numerous through the province, and he felt an anxiety, probably from secret disapprobation of the unjust and cruel measures which had been adopted by his predecessors, and employed by himself, to receive directions from the emperor with relation to the conduct which in future he should follow towards them. In the letter which he wrote for this purpose he does not explain who the Christians were, but, taking it for granted that their origin was perfectly known, he describes how he had acted to such of them as had been brought before him. He gives the substance of what, from the confession of apostates, or the declarations of those who had been put to the torture, he had learnt concerning them ; facts reflecting everlasting honour upon the purity and excellence of the primitive disciples ; and he adds, what I particularly would observe in this place, that he conceived the subject, about which he was writing, to be highly deserving the consideration of the emperor, “ more especially, as great numbers would be involved in the danger of these prosecutions set on foot against the Christians, this inquiry having already extended, and being about to extend to persons of all ranks, and ages, and even of both sexes. For” he continues, “ this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread its infection among the villages, and through the country.”

From this letter it is evident, not only that Christianity was, during the government of Pliny, spread through Pontus and Bithynia, and had been professed there for many years, some of the persons whom he examined declaring, that more than twenty years had

elapsed since they renounced it, but that it had made great progress through the empire. This plainly follows from the manner in which the epistle is written, and indeed from its being written at all. It is not likely that Pliny, had the Christians been confined to Bithynia, would have had recourse to the emperor for instructions, or if he had, he would have given a more particular account of them, as, upon this supposition, Trajan must have been before totally ignorant of their existence, or at least, too little skilled in their origin and views, to be able to guide a person so enlightened as Pliny, and who had every advantage for forming his own resolutions respecting them. It was from its having been judged necessary to direct against them the civil power, in consequence of their being regarded as enemies to the government and religion of the empire, and because Pliny was doubtful in what way he ought to do so, that he was solicitous to receive express instructions from the emperor.

The speedy and extensive progress of Christianity after this period, is particularly and very frequently mentioned by the writers of the second and third centuries, in works which they addressed to their enemies, and in which therefore they must have seen the necessity of accurately stating the facts which they adduced. Justin Martyr, who wrote about the middle of the second century, and consequently not very many years after Pliny, informs us that there was no nation, Greek nor Barbarian, that is, no nation with which he was acquainted, in which thanksgiving was not offered to God through a crucified Saviour.

Irenæus, at no remote period from the days of Justin, specified incidentally churches which were established in Germany, in the east, in Egypt, and Africa; and

Tertullian, reasoning with the Jews, dwells upon the universal reception of the Gospel, including among those who had embraced it, not only the inhabitants of countries contiguous to Judea, or in the vicinity of Rome, but those who dwelt in the extremities of Spain, and in what he calls the inaccessible coasts of Britain. The same author, in one of his apologies, has this remarkable passage: "We are of yesterday, yet we have filled cities, islands, camps, palaces, the market-place, and even the senate itself."

The decline of Paganism from this period was very rapid; and, in the fourth century, the emperor Constantine, either from belief or policy, after professing himself convinced of the divine origin of Christianity, established it as the religion of the empire.

These different testimonies place the early diffusion of Christianity beyond a doubt; and I have brought them down further than was absolutely necessary to the subject, because the adoption of the religion of Jesus by the emperors gives the strongest confirmation to the separate declarations of writers before the æra at which this took place, and because the fact, that such progress was made by the apostles, in the execution of their design, is of so astonishing a nature, as to render, even in a philosophical view, the investigation of the causes of that progress most interesting to an enlightened mind. No chain of argument, indeed, could so forcibly illustrate the unreasonableness of indifference and inattention to Christianity, which often originate, it is true, from the unfortunate perversion of improper education, or from a great degree of ignorance, but which have been frequently and most unwarrantably represented as resulting from genuine philosophy, which most unequivocally disowns them.

The other fact upon which the argument which I

am to state rests, is, that the preaching of the apostles was founded upon the resurrection of Christ, or that belief in this event was essential to the profession of Christianity.

The proof of this may be conveyed in a very few words, for it has never, in as far as I know, been called in question. St. Peter, in the discourse to which I have already alluded, declares, that he who had been hanged upon a tree had been raised from the grave, and had ascended to Heaven. The language uniformly held to the Gentiles was, that if Christ had not risen, their faith was vain; and that they ought to glory in the cross of Christ, which, although it had proved to the Jews a stumbling block, and appeared to the Greeks to be foolishness, did, notwithstanding, most strikingly illustrate the power, the wisdom, and the mercy of God.

It could not be supposed that heathen historians, and writers who did not minutely examine into the nature of Christianity, would be qualified to give a particular or accurate account of its doctrines. But from what even they have incidentally mentioned, and mentioned because it was inseparably connected with the name of Christian, it is evident that Jesus Christ, who had been put to death as a malefactor, was venerated by his followers as the author of their faith, was even worshipped as a God, and was regarded with the warmest sentiments of gratitude and love; which could not have been the case, had they believed that he never rose from the grave, and did not fulfil those predictions of his resurrection, which the books received by them as sacred informed them that he had often uttered.

Having thus endeavoured to place beyond a doubt that the apostles were eminently successful in disseminating the gospel of their Master, and that this success



was founded upon the fact of the resurrection, the way is paved for stating, that there thus arises very strong evidence that the resurrection really happened ; or, to put the argument in different words, it is hence apparent, that, if there had not been the plainest and most convincing evidence that Jesus rose from the grave, Christianity would have been extinguished with his life, or would never, to any extent, have been received as a Divine revelation.

The illustration of this argument naturally divides itself into two parts, marked out by the different classes of men who were converted, and by the diversity of circumstances which accompanied their conversion. The apostles began their ministry in Jerusalem, and there persuaded many Jews to embrace Christianity ; they then directed their attention to the Gentile nations, and among them too they laboured with the happiest success. It will be found, that the conversion of each of these descriptions of men affords a peculiar evidence in support of the resurrection : and the conversion of both, viewed together, can scarcely fail to remove every doubt upon the subject. I shall particularly consider the two cases in separate chapters.

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## CHAPTER II.

It very strongly establishes the truth of the resurrection, that in Jerusalem itself numbers were converted to the faith ; or, which is the same thing, were convinced by the apostles that Jesus, upon the third day after his crucifixion, rose from the dead.

If the whole scheme of the resurrection had been a fabrication, devised either by Jesus himself, or, what is, upon the supposition of imposture, much more probable, by his disciples after his death, the last place which common prudence would have pointed out as the scene where it was to be first announced, was Jerusalem. In that city the public attention had long been directed to Jesus ; his death had excited the liveliest interest, and the remarkable circumstances which attended it had induced those who were in possession of the civil power to take such steps with regard to it, as could leave no doubt upon the minds of any who chose to inquire, whether it was an ordinary death, or whether Jesus like other men, remained in the grave ?

If, then, the Apostles had been so infatuated, as to attempt to carry into execution a scheme, founded upon such an event as the resurrection, they would naturally have chosen for this purpose some country, remote from that in which they said it had happened, and, by thus cutting off the possibility of immediately detecting the falsehood which they announced, have allowed to themselves full scope for practising upon the credulity of mankind. Yet, so far from this having been the case, it is undoubted that they began their efforts in Jerusalem, and that they did not repair to other countries till multitudes in that city were convinced by their preaching.

And, at what time did they commence their ministry ? Not, as upon the idea of imposture might most readily be supposed, long after the death of Jesus, when every thing respecting him had been obliterated from the public mind, but within two months of the period at which the crucifixion took place, when curiosity was not only entire, but had received an additional impulse from those rumours of the resurrection, which,

so early as the third day after he expired upon the cross, had been circulated, and which were every day more extensively diffused.

Nor did they, at this time, only in private insinuate that Christ had risen, thus hiding themselves from the observation which would have confounded them, that they might work upon the passions, or upon the ignorance of obscure individuals, and then, when they had insidiously formed a party to support their pretensions, speak openly to the world; they at once publicly announced that their Master had been restored to life. They exercised their ministry in the most conspicuous places, in the temple, wherever they saw men assembled; and when, from the boldness of their procedure, they attracted the notice of those who were in authority, and were carried before the Sanhedrim, they did not shrink from the charge which was there brought against them, but, in the presence of their judges, of the very men who had put Jesus to death, who had procured the guard for the sepulchre, and who, therefore, could instantly have exposed them, had they deviated from truth, they firmly and unequivocally declared what they had declared to the people, and appealed to their enemies for the confirmation of what they said, using this manly, confident language,—whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

These facts, which stand upon unquestionable evidence, do, taken together, afford a strong presumption that the apostles were conscious that they spoke what was true. But I introduce them here, chiefly to observe from them, that, laying the state of mind of the apostles out of view, this mode of announcing the resurrection must have infallibly unmasked its falsehood, if it never took place. It was morally impossible, under all the

circumstances which have been stated, that multitudes could have been deceived with regard to such an event, unless, indeed, there were inducements to credit it, which disposed them to acquiesce with implicit credulity; that is, unless Christianity was so gratifying to their prejudices, or to their passions, as, upon the principle of men being eager to believe what they wish to be true, to insinuate itself, although the marks of delusion and falsehood were conspicuously stamped upon it. How far this was from being the case, can be very satisfactorily shewn.

The Jewish nation, as I have already had occasion incidentally to observe, were firmly persuaded, from ancient prophecies, that a messenger from God was to appear amongst them, and was to establish in Jerusalem the seat of universal empire. This opinion, which was so gratifying to their national character, and which tended to strengthen the contempt or the hatred which they entertained for all who did not belong to the commonwealth, or believe in the religion of Israel, was, at the time of the appearance of Jesus, peculiarly endeared to them from their political situation. The Roman arms had been directed, with their accustomed success, against Judea; the Jews had been compelled to witness within the holy city, and even within the temple itself, the ravages of a heathen enemy; the power of inflicting capital punishment had been wrested from them, and a governor, appointed by the emperor, had fixed his residence in their land. Their antipathy to such humiliating subjection was increased by the harshness with which the tribute imposed by their conquerors was collected. Those constant invasions of domestic peace, to which, under this system, even the humblest individual was compelled to submit, and which, without the destruction of every natural feeling, it was

impossible not to consider as the most grating oppression, led them, with fond anxiety, to look for the appearance of that Messiah, who, as they thought, was to break asunder their chains, and to satiate the ambition which adversity had been unable to eradicate.

Their expectations were the more ardent, at the period of which I speak, from their conviction, that the days of this Sovereign were about to commence. Their sacred books intimated, that when supreme authority was taken from them, or when a number of years, most definitely marked out, had elapsed, the descendant of David would raise his triumphant standard. It was natural for those who entertained such sanguine hopes, not to confine them to their own breasts, but to publish them with delight to others. This was done by the Jews, for it is recorded, even by heathen historians, that it had long, and very generally been believed, that some distinguished personage was at this period to arise in Judea ; an idea which could have been derived from no other sources than from the books of the Jews, or from the Jewish interpretations of these books.\*

When, accordingly, Jesus Christ proclaimed himself to be the Messiah, his disciples, although they could not reconcile the humble situation in which he appeared with the splendour of royal dignity, or with that glory which they had associated with the idea of the anointed of God, were satisfied that he was what he declared, silencing the doubt which occasionally arose in their minds, by supposing that, although for reasons which he did not

\* *Percrebuerat oriente toto vetus et constans opinio, esse in fatis, ut Judaea profecti rerum potirentur.* SÜETONIUS.

*Pluribus persuasio inerat, antiquis sacerdotum libris contineri, eo ipso tempore fore ut valesceret oriens, profectique Judaea rerum potirentur.* TACITUS.

wish to explain, and which it might be proper for a season to conceal, he had delayed to announce his dignity, he would soon proclaim himself to be their Sovereign, and would then employ his miraculous power to effectuate the revolution which they were convinced he was to accomplish.

But although their affection for Jesus disposed them thus to reconcile with their preconceived notions, their faith in a Master who had not where to lay his head, yet, when he made known his pretensions to the nation at large, and taught the astonished Jews that he was the Deliverer, of whom all their prophets had spoken,—regardless of the purity and the virtue of his life, and little disposed to venerate these as the most glorious diadem of sovereignty, they considered him in no other light, than that of a mean, an illiterate, and a friendless Nazarene. They did not, however, look on him with the coldness of indifference, or the scorn of contempt. Their fears, and their hopes, were alarmed, and, in the anguish of anticipated disappointment, cherishing the most inveterate hatred against him, they formed the determination of inflicting upon him the awful punishment, which, as a blasphemer, they persuaded themselves that he merited. Even the greatness of his miracles, although it filled all of them with astonishment, and suggested to those who candidly reflected upon what they saw, the natural and important question,—whether the Messiah could do greater things than this man did? was not sufficient to counteract the force of their long established prepossessions. The chief priests and Pharisees, from the moment that they were aware of the extent of his claims, declared their enmity, by taking every method to embarrass and perplex him; and the multitude, although they sometimes came to



him as friends, and expressed their gratitude and their admiration, no sooner found that he would not consent to be their king, than they were inflamed with the same spirit which influenced their rulers ; and soon, by the most cruel and inhuman outrage, by imploring that he might be put to death, and by insulting him even when he hung in the agonies of dissolution, showed how acutely they felt their disappointment.

But if Christianity thus shocked their prejudices during the life of Jesus, how much more must it have done so when presented to them in the form which it necessarily assumed after his death. While he lived there was at least a possibility that the opinion of the apostles respecting him was well-founded, and that he would, at the most proper time, raise the ensign of civil authority. But, after his crucifixion, the hopes of the most sanguine must have been destroyed, for the gospel then announced, what by every faithful Israelite must have been heard with the most heart-rending emotions, that the Messiah, the anticipation of whose arrival had so long soothed their sorrows, and had even softened the pressure of the servitude under which they groaned, was already come, being that person whom they had seen encompassed by calamity, and whom they had themselves ignominiously crucified, imploring that his blood might be upon them and their children. It announced that he was actually their King, although in a sense very different from that which they had ever imagined ; his kingdom not being of this world, and requiring, before admission to its privileges and blessings could be granted, that the world and its pursuits should be regarded as of very inferior value to the love of God and the acquisition of virtue. It farther declared, that the sublime descriptions which the prophets had given of the glory, the

extent, and the duration of the Messiah's sovereignty, upon which they had rested their ideas of an earthly dominion, had in him found their fulfilment, a fulfilment most wonderfully, yet most accurately harmonising with those other predictions which marked him out as to appear without form and comeliness, which declared that he was to be led as a lamb to the slaughter, and to bear the iniquities of the people.

Such doctrines, so opposite to the faith of the Jews, founded, as they were satisfied, upon divine authority, and, at the same time, most gratifying to passions very congenial to the heart, doctrines too, which completely overcast every prospect upon which they had delighted to dwell, must, if they had been supported by no evidence, have been naturally rejected with disdain or abhorrence.

Yet it was not in this particular only that Christianity was repugnant to their feelings. It contained principles which, if possible, inflicted a deeper wound upon their minds ; for it professed to abolish the distinction between Jew and Gentile, that distinction which had existed from the most remote period to which memory or tradition could recur, which, in all the diversities of their situation, had influenced their sentiments, and which had enabled them, after they were subdued by the Romans, to look upon their conquerors as infinitely inferior to themselves.

Nor was even this all, for it also predicted that Jerusalem was within a few years to be destroyed ; that the Temple, in which God had placed his name, to which, from every part of Judea, and even from the most distant countries into which they had dispersed themselves, they had habitually repaired, and which they fondly considered as the monument of divine favour, the pledge that the blessing of heaven would

never be withdrawn from them, was to be laid in ruins by the heathen ; while the inhabitants of the holy city, after enduring all the miseries of the most rigorous blockade, after being reduced to extremities of suffering which the savage devastations of war had never before occasioned, and after seeing the sepulchres of their fathers insulted and profaned, were to be, in the most signal manner, scattered through the world, and not, till a period most obscurely marked out, to be permitted to take up their residence in their beloved country.

As Christianity thus subverted the political opinions of the Jews, which, viewed as directly resulting from their religion, must have more powerfully influenced them than such opinions do other men, so it directly struck at their notions of religion itself, representing piety and righteousness in a very different light from that in which they had been accustomed to regard them.

The Mosaical dispensation was given to the Jews at a period when they were themselves little advanced in civilization, and when the most polished and enlightened nations had embraced a most absurd, though, from various causes, a most fascinating system of idolatry. The great doctrines which the inspired lawgiver of Israel was commissioned to inculcate, were the unity and perfections of the Supreme Being ; and, as these sublime tenets were little adapted to the grovelling and very limited conceptions of men immersed in the ignorance in which the Jews were involved, the religion which was addressed to them was most wisely so framed, as to counteract, in a very considerable degree, the inclination which they might be supposed to feel for adopting the more material and palpable religion of their heathen neighbours. For this purpose, in conjunction with other most important ends which I need

not here mention, and which, indeed, suppose that the Old Testament was a revelation from heaven, numberless ceremonies were instituted ; and there was incorporated with the worship of the Deity, a magnificence which irresistibly drew the attention, which excited the strongest emotions, and which enabled the mind, without a painful effort, to contemplate the living and true God.

The wisest men among the Jews, it will readily be admitted, well understood the place which the ceremonial part of their divine service ought to hold ; being fully sensible that, when disjoined from the end for which it was appointed, it was of no value. But the great body of the people, probably from a very early period, confounded it with devotion, considering it as, in itself, of infinite moment ; and their teachers, in process of time, fell into the same error, representing the observance of rites, and festivals, and days, as an unequivocal evidence of a pious and devout frame of mind. The consequence of this was, that real piety and real virtue were very much neglected, even by those who talked most about religion, and who, perhaps, believed that they really were directed by it. Every person knows that, in the days of Jesus, the men who were revered for their sanctity and zeal, concealed, under the covering of hypocritical, or, perhaps, deluded profession, the most corrupt habits, and the most disgusting vices which can stain the character.

The views of religion, then, which, with very few exceptions, were, for a long period before the introduction of Christianity, entertained in Judea, were in the highest degree erroneous. They indulged, however, that very strong desire which has so extensively, in all ages, influenced the human mind, of substituting for real holiness an external service, which might be accu-

rately performed, without including any effort to regulate and to improve the heart, and also gratified that love of splendour, the operation of which may be traced under every form of pagan superstition.

To such views of religion, nothing could be more opposite than Christianity. It laid the axe to the root of the tree, inculcating, that true religion displays its power in forming the dispositions, and the moral principles of those who believe in it; that it has its seat in the heart; and that the design of positive institutions is to excite or invigorate the activity of virtue. The foundation of the Gospel, that God is a spirit, to be worshipped every where in spirit and in truth, ill agreed with the pomp and with the contracted sphere of the Temple service. Injunctions to purify the source of action, and to prefer, to the austerity of mortification, and to the most striking external appearances of sanctity, the approbation of a good conscience, did not correspond with the maxims of men, who had made void the law of God by their traditions, who acted, and who had taught the people to act upon the accommodating principle, that if they paid tythe of mint, and anise, and cummin, if they did what the most worthless might easily do, they might neglect the most important duties, without any apprehension of having forfeited the blessing of God.

But Christianity was not only opposite in its spirit to that system of religion, which, through the artifice or the superstition of men, had been engrafted upon the Old Testament, or to what may be called the abuses of the Mosaical dispensation; it expressly declared, that that dispensation itself, in the form in which it had been given from Mount Sinai, was abrogated and set aside; because having been intended, by divine wisdom, to prepare the world for a more general system of religion,

the priesthood, the circumcision, the sacrifices, all of which had a direct reference to this design, were abolished, what they shadowed forth having been fulfilled by the religion of Jesus.

A doctrine, then, in all respects, more repugnant to Jewish sentiments than that which the apostles, after the ascension, required their countrymen to receive as the revealed will of God, ingenuity could not devise ; and it is of much importance to observe, that this repugnance was so obvious, that it must at once, by all who heard of Christianity, have been perceived. In this point of view, the argument which I am stating must appear to have great weight.

When the apostles attached themselves to Jesus, they were entirely unacquainted with the nature of the doctrines which he was to propose to the world. They believed that he was the Messiah ; they conceived that he would certainly show himself to be so by temporal exaltation, and he did not attempt immediately to undeceive them. He proceeded in the direction of their sentiments with a delicacy which evinced the most profound knowledge of human nature ; so conjoining the discoveries which he made to them with what they had always considered as the truth, that these discoveries seemed naturally and unavoidably to result from it. By thus slowly opening their views, and cultivating their understandings, he brought them to embrace doctrines which, had they been without any preparation proposed to them, they would, without the hesitation of a moment, have rejected.

This mode of procedure the experience of most men teaches them to be necessary even in what is of infinitely less importance than a change of religion. It is vain to think of compelling opinion ; prejudices must be regarded with tenderness, and the steps which lead



from them must be taken with the utmost caution, otherwise success cannot be reasonably expected, and the most brilliant powers of persuasion will fail to make any lasting impression upon the mind.

But this method of advancing the progress of truth which Jesus, in condescension to human weakness, employed, which experience has so fully approved, and upon which, indeed, every human attempt to sway passions, and to counteract prejudices must be founded, was totally neglected by the first teachers of Christianity. They at once proposed, as necessary to salvation, what, when regarded in itself, every Jew must have execrated, what he could not, indeed, admit to be divine truth, without tearing from his breast the most firmly rooted opinions, and overcoming the influence of some of the most powerful feelings of the heart.

The conclusion which obviously follows from this opposition which I have shown to subsist between Christianity, as it was announced by the apostles, and any system which would have been acceptable or gratifying to the Jews, many of whom, however, embraced Christianity, must have been, by every attentive reader, anticipated, that those of the Jews who were converted would not rashly be so, but must have been decided by evidence so apparent that, however much they might have been disposed contemptuously to reject it, they found themselves compelled to admit it as sufficient to establish their faith.

Now, what was the method which the apostles adopted to convince the Jews that the doctrines of the Gospel proceeded from God? They did not defend them and their claims by the intricacy of argument; they did not endeavour, by much diversity of evidence, to bewilder and perplex the understandings of those to whom they addressed themselves; but, they plain-

ly told them,—this religion which we preach to you, which sets aside the religion of your fathers, puts an end to your hopes of a temporal sovereign, and wrests from you the glorious and long enjoyed distinction of being the favoured people of God, is shown to be a divine revelation, by an event which happened very lately in Jerusalem, and which all of you know to have happened,—the resurrection from the dead of Jesus of Nazareth, whom you often heard declare that he was so to rise. If, then, the resurrection had never taken place, the obvious answer to all this was, we reject your religion, because we are certain that the event upon which you found its authority did not happen; or if any, from not having directed their attention to the subject, could not at once have said this, they would have replied,—we do not know that Jesus rose from the dead, we must inquire for ourselves into this matter, and be perfectly satisfied with regard to it before we acknowledge him to be the Messiah.

But no such answers were given. The immense number who heard St. Peter appeal to the resurrection, were perfectly conscious that he was appealing to a fact, the existence of which admitted of no dispute; and not perceiving how, consistently with reason, they could do otherwise, they, without hesitation, adopted the conclusion, and were added to the church. Could this have been the case, had the whole story been a contrivance, or had the apostles' faith in the resurrection been the result of enthusiasm, or of a distempered fancy? Can we suppose that, situated as the Jewish converts were, and infallibly guarded against the influence of enthusiasm in favour of Christianity, they would thus readily have attached themselves to it? If we dispa-

sionately consider the subject, we can scarcely fail justly to appreciate the strength of this part of the evidence, and to be convinced that the rapid conversion of so many who, without the slightest difficulty, could have certainly ascertained whether the resurrection of Jesus was true or false, affords the highest presumption that our Lord did actually rise from the grave.

And it is to be added, that the immediate consequence of embracing Christianity was the most intolerable suffering. Every Jew was sensible, from what had been his own feelings, and from the part which, perhaps, he had himself acted towards Jesus, that he could expect no indulgence from his unconverted brethren. He must, therefore, have been fully aware of the import of those predictions relating to the sufferings of Christians, which were anxiously brought into view by the very men who enforced the religion, the profession of which was to secure their fulfilment. This, then, was surely a very strong additional motive for circumspection, for cautiously, and even incredulously, inquiring into the reality of the resurrection; a motive which must have had universal influence, and the existence of which renders it almost absolutely inconceivable how any could have become the disciples of Christ, unless the resurrection had been believed at Jerusalem, and unless that belief had rested upon the most obvious grounds of conviction.

It certainly can have no tendency to invalidate the reasoning which has conducted to this conclusion, vaguely to urge that the Jews might have neglected to make the proper investigation, or to remark in general, that we cannot safely argue, from the conduct of any class of men, for the truth of an alleged fact. If we admit positions of this nature, we renounce the very foundation of evidence, and we admit what uniform ex-

perience may lead us, without hesitation, to reject, that human nature was, in Judea, at the time when Christianity was introduced, a very different system from what it has been in all parts of the world—from what it now is in Europe. If, for example, in any large city of Britain, a person had, for years, declared that he was to be put to death at a particular time, and in three days after was to be restored to life; if this person had most powerfully interested the minds of those who heard him, of enemies no less than of friends; if, upon the truth of what he said, the existence of the city, of the privileges, the possessions, or the domestic comforts of the inhabitants had depended; and if, in consequence of all this, the magistrates, to prevent fraud or misapprehension, by having it in their power to give an accurate and circumstantial account of what was to happen, had judged it expedient to surround the tomb, in which, after his decease, he was laid, with a force sufficient to prevent any from entering it; I think that the most determined infidel with respect to religion must admit, not only that the magistrates must have known whether the person rose, but that, upon the rumour of this having taken place, the great body of the inhabitants would be most anxious to ascertain what was really the fact, and would find no difficulty in obtaining such information as would enable them to decide upon the truth of the report. Now, if it be granted that in this supposed case, there would be the utmost desire to be informed about the person's fate, why should it not be granted that there would be in Jerusalem the same desire to discover what was the fate of Jesus. The motives of the Jews for instituting the inquiry were the strongest imaginable, and we may therefore infer that there would be a disposition to inquire.

If, however, it still be contended, that the Jews did not feel as we should do, and if the illustration which has been given of the fallacy of this be not sufficient to expose it, it is, I am afraid, vain to reason with him who adheres to such an idea ; because, in this case at least, he denies those first principles which must be assumed before it is possible to reason.

The whole of this branch of the argument is very much strengthened by the character of the Jewish nation. Whatever may be the degree of ignorance or credulity which we conceive may be ascribed to the Jews about the period of our Lord's manifestation, and perhaps very loose and unfounded opinions with respect to both these points have been pretty generally entertained, it is an undoubted fact, that, for a long period of their history, they showed no fickleness with regard to their religion ; that propensity to idolatry which, in the first ages of their history, often misled them, having been completely eradicated during the Babylonish captivity. And they have not, in this feature of their character, undergone any change during the time which has elapsed since the introduction of Christianity, for they have uniformly shown an inflexibility in their attachment to the faith of their fathers, which no vicissitudes of fortune, no degree of insult and wretchedness, and not even the loss of wealth, to which they are proverbially devoted, has been able to shake. When such was, and has so long been the temper of this singular people, the very striking exception to it, afforded by the immediate conversion of such vast numbers to Christianity, in consequence of an appeal to the resurrection, does furnish a strong reason for believing that this event certainly happened, and adds to the weight of the many other reasons by which this conclusion is established.

But to the evidence for the resurrection, thus derived from the success which attended the ministry of the apostles in Jerusalem, there is to be added the evidence arising from the conduct of those in that city who rejected Christianity.

As the chief priests and Pharisees, who took so active a part in the persecution of Jesus, resisted evidence afforded by works which they themselves acknowledged to be miraculous, we cannot be astonished that, even upon the supposition of the truth of the resurrection, they continued to oppose the religion which it supported; in other words, their opposition does not furnish any rational presumption that our Lord did not rise. But we may certainly infer, from the dispositions and views which produced that opposition, that they would narrowly watch the steps of the disciples, that they would thoroughly scrutinize their conduct, and would carefully mark whatever, in their estimation, had a tendency to repress a religion, against which they entertained so confirmed a prejudice. They had succeeded, during the life of Jesus, in keeping the people attached to them; they had found means, notwithstanding the astonishment produced by his miracles, to persuade almost every one to reject his claims as the Messiah, and the necessity of continuing the most unremitted exertions in preserving these sentiments, was, if possible, increased after his death, because the rumour of the resurrection had, when they were delighting themselves with the persuasion of having put an end to his doctrine, produced the most marked effect upon the public mind, and had instantaneously converted many more than in the whole course of his ministry he had converted. Amongst this number were included multitudes of those Jews, whose zeal had brought them from remote corners of Judea, or from foreign countries, to



celebrate the passover at Jerusalem, and whom the chief priests had rendered very instrumental in increasing their affluence, and extending their authority. This was most alarming, and the Pharisees were very acute in perceiving that it was so. They knew well, that the whole fabric which they were so much interested to support, rested upon popular opinion, and that the moment they lost the direction of this, their importance would be annihilated.

They accordingly determined to take the most decisive measures for quashing this report of the resurrection, and for re-exciting the veneration of the people for what they represented as the religion of Moses. Now, what to men deliberating how to correct the sentiments of others respecting an imposture, must naturally have suggested itself as the most effectual method of proceeding? Certainly to exhibit the imposture in its true light, by giving a plain and well authenticated account of what was really the fact. In the case now before us, this must have been quite decisive, and, as I before observed, if the resurrection was not true, they must have had it in their power thoroughly to expose its falsehood. Instead, however, of doing this, they had recourse to violence. They called the teachers of the new religion into their presence, and prohibited them from speaking any more in the name of Jesus, threatening them with the most severe punishment if they should be guilty of disobedience. They could not have chosen a better way of satisfying mankind that Christ actually rose; the proof which they adduced against Christianity being one which has been often used in its support, which the Inquisition, more particularly, has regarded as decisive, but which never made one proselyte, and which, we may venture to affirm, would never have been resorted

to, even by its most zealous friends, if they had not more than suspected that they were in the wrong.

That no such account as I have mentioned was published, does not, however, rest merely, or even chiefly, upon their employing persecution ; it is established by direct, and very satisfactory evidence. The story which was put into the mouth of the soldiers I consider to be out of the question ; it was the suggestion of the moment, and the inventors seem to have been so much ashamed of it, as never to feel the slightest inclination to give it their support. Had any other account, such an account as intelligent men, who knew the whole story of the resurrection to be an imposition, and who had in their possession irresistible proof of this, would have given, ever been published, it would, in all probability, have been directly mentioned, or some allusion would have been made to it by the historians of Jesus ; because, to have passed it over without notice, or without some attempt to refute it, would have been virtually to give up their cause.

But whatever might have been the conduct of the evangelists, there is an author of that period, in whose writings we should have certainly found it. Josephus, the Jewish historian, himself of the priesthood, and warmly attached to the interests, and apparently to the faith of his nation, who wrote a history of the memorable siege, and of the complete destruction of Jerusalem, and who lived after Christianity had made considerable progress, could not have omitted so interesting a document. Yet he has preserved a total silence respecting the resurrection ; that passage in which the life of Jesus is shortly given, being almost certainly spurious. It may then be inferred, that he knew of no contradictory testimony to that of the apostles ; the more so, as the publication of it would have contributed

to ingratiate him with the Roman emperor, and would thus have promoted his interest no less than gratified his enmity to the religion of Christ.\*

Our holy religion had not been long published before adversaries endeavoured to confute it. Some of these opponents lived so near the period of our Lord's manifestation, that if they had made any inquiry, they could not be ignorant whether the apostles had been detected as the forgers of the history of the resurrection. But we have not the most distant insinuation from them that this was the case, although they must have perceived that the production of an opposite testimony would have much more certainly destroyed the credit of a religion professing to be founded upon facts, than the most ingenious reasoning.

The great part of the Jewish nation rejected Christianity; they entertained the most rooted hatred against

\* Josephus, of the race of priests, was born at Jerusalem, in the first year of Caligula, A. D. 37, and he was present at the siege of Jerusalem, A. D. 70. His natural partiality to his countrymen he showed by composing two books against Ap-pion, an Egyptian writer, who had calumniated the Jewish people. Disbelief in the authenticity of the famous testimony to our Saviour, inserted in the works of Josephus, is founded upon the inconsistency of that testimony with the avowed sentiments of the historian, and upon the fact that it was never cited by the earliest apologists for Christianity, to whom it must have appeared of importance, but was first mentioned by Eusebius, in the fourth century. The silence of Josephus with respect to Christianity is very remarkable, but it is as favourable to it as if he had really written the disputed passage. From the time at which he lived, a period most glorious to our religion, because, in the course of it, it was most extensively diffused, it is apparent that he must have been led to attend to it, and must often have reflected upon it. How expressive, then, is his silence!

its professors ; and they did so, because they trusted that their Messiah would still appear in the manner in which they had always supposed that he would come ; imputing the delay of his manifestation, beyond the time which they admitted was marked out by the prophets, to the iniquities of their nation, which the Almighty had, by this delay, awfully punished.

This opinion, which, upon the supposition of the truth of the resurrection, was wholly untenable, would have acquired some probability, had it been incontestibly established, that Jesus had no commission from God, because he was the only person to whom the title of Messiah could, with any shadow of propriety, have been applied. Now, the best way to do this, was to prove that he did not rise on the third day. Had this proof then been in the possession of the chief men, it would, with the utmost eagerness and assiduity, have been circulated amongst the people ; and it would have been anxiously preserved, both from its affording a justification for the crucifixion of Jesus, and from its being directly calculated to remove the doubts, which the rapid diffusion of Christianity, conjoined with the sudden and tremendous destruction of the temple and the city, must have raised in the minds of all who reflected upon such astonishing events.

In this point of view, we may consider the general infidelity of the Jewish nation as certifying, in the most unexceptionable manner, to future ages, that there was no collusion in the case of the apostles, and that no testimony contradictory to theirs was ever considered, even by their enemies, as of sufficient credit to merit repetition.

Upon the certainty that the Jews would have preserved such testimony if they had judged it worthy of belief, an important observation may be founded.

It is known that the books of the most eminent of those who wrote in the first ages against the divine origin of Christianity have not come down to our days ; and there is too much ground to suspect that, from an illiberal and very ill judged zeal, they were destroyed by the Christians. Now, although such of the fathers as devoted their attention to the refutation of these men, have inserted in their writings what they represent as the arguments which had been employed against the truth, still it might have been suspected, that they gave a very partial representation, and that they expected much more success from unwarrantable exertions of power, than from the soundness of their reasoning.

What I have said respecting the Jews, destroys, in as far as the resurrection is concerned, the insinuation thus conveyed against the evidence of the gospel ; placing it beyond a doubt that, whatever were the contents of the works of Celsus and Porphyry, they contained nothing destructive of the testimony of the apostles, or no contradictory statement from authority ; the preservation of any thing of this nature not depending upon the fate of a few volumes, which accident or intention might destroy, but upon the existence of the Jewish nation. While we are assured that they have continued from the days of Christ, and that their sentiments respecting his mission have remained unvaried, we may be satisfied, that as such a statement could not have been obliterated from their minds, so it would have never been permitted to sink into obscurity.

Thus, then, whether we consider the sudden conversion of so many Jews in consequence of the resurrection, or the manner in which those who were not converted acted with regard to this event, we are furnished with decisive proof that it was impossible to

controvert the fact, or which is in this case of the same amount, that the resurrection did certainly happen.

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### CHAPTER III.

It very strikingly confirms the truth of the resurrection, that the apostles, by appealing to this fact, converted to Christianity great numbers of every description of men throughout the Roman empire, and even in the city of Rome.

The general principle is the same in this as in the former part of the argument, that it is impossible, consistently with human nature, to account for the rapid progress of Christianity through the empire, unless there was the plainest evidence exhibited that the resurrection of Jesus really happened. But the application of the principle is considerably different, and thus by giving a new view of the argument, it increases its force, affording additional evidence of the divine origin of the gospel.

To place this part of the argument in its just light, I shall take a general view of the nature of the religious opinions which were entertained by the heathens, and of the influence which these exerted over their minds; I shall point out the obstacles which stood in the way of the reception of Christianity, arising from the doctrines and spirit of that religion, and from all the circumstances attending its introduction; I shall endeavour to prove that there was nothing either taught by the apostles, or arising from the belief of what they taught, which could have rendered the new faith acceptable to those who heard it; I shall then state the



argument arising from these particulars ; and I shall afterwards show what support it derives from the history of mankind, since the period at which the religion of Christ was made known to the world. For the sake of perspicuity, I shall divide what I have to state upon these different particulars, into five sections.

## SECTION I.

### GENERAL VIEW OF THE RELIGIOUS OPINIONS ENTER- TAINED BY THE HEATHEN, AND OF THE INFLUENCE WHICH THESE EXERTED OVER THEIR MINDS.

HOWEVER obvious the unity of God may in modern times appear, it is certain that it has never been generally discovered by the unenlightened reason of mankind, and that although there is much ground to believe that it was clearly revealed to the original ancestors of the human race, the knowledge of it was lost amidst the barbarism which resulted from the dispersion of their posterity, when little advanced in civilization, through the different regions of the world. The annals of every nation lead us back to a period when its inhabitants were attached to idolatry ; and those nations which, through the enterprise of navigators, have been lately discovered, and which are, at present, very much in the situation in which Europe once was, are, as might have been conjectured, unacquainted with the pure and sublime tenets of natural religion.

The dependence of man, when in a savage state, upon the vicissitudes of the seasons, upon the invigorating influence of the sun, the light of the moon, and the position of the stars, naturally fixed his attention upon these glorious objects ; and accordingly, the most ancient

form of idolatry, or the first deviation from the primitive religion derived from heaven, is that which attributes divinity to the celestial bodies.

But it was soon perceived that the human race could very materially influence their own condition. Individuals arose, possessed of the discernment and energy of genius, who pointed out to those with whom they associated, methods of facilitating labour, of procuring, with certainty, supplies of food which before had been precarious, and of warding off more effectually the destructive ravages of wild beasts, or the no less dreaded fury of hostile tribes. The benefit arising from such suggestions was soon experienced by all the members of the community, and was gradually diffused amongst neighbouring families; life, in consequence of it, became more comfortable, and the most fervent gratitude was cherished towards those to whom they had been indebted for increased security, and for new sources of happiness.

At a period when the feelings and affections, not subjected to the control of judgment, or to the early habitual restraint which, in more advanced society, is necessarily imposed, are possessed of much impetuosity, it was natural for mankind to dwell with enthusiastic veneration upon the memory of their benefactors; to assign to them supreme felicity in that future state of existence, faith in which has, in all ages, and in all diversities of situation, prevailed amongst men, and even to conceive, that, as they had been favoured, while upon earth, with the illumination of deities friendly to man, they had, in heavenly regions, been admitted to the participation of their divinity. When imagination had thus invested them with divine attributes, they soon came to be regarded as the only, or as the principal objects of religious veneration and worship. The

remembrance of them was preserved by engaging in the usual employments, and participating of the ordinary blessings of life ; the most ignorant could thus easily form some idea of their nature, and of the homage which should be paid to them, and he was inclined to pay it, to seek with anxiety to conciliate their favour, and to ensure their protection, by a persuasion, exciting that love of interest which so powerfully influences the mind, that they still watched over the arts which they had invented, that they might still guide men in the advancement of these arts, or might discover to them what would bestow additional comfort, and remove evils against which no mode of preservation had yet been devised.

This species of idolatry thus naturally succeeded, or was incorporated with that which proposed the heavenly bodies as the objects of worship. It was the system established in what were regarded as the most enlightened of the adjacent countries when Romulus founded his city ; it was introduced by him amongst his lawless followers ; and it was improved and reduced into a form fitted to influence and guide the mind, by Numa, his distinguished successor, who, even at that remote period, had rendered himself familiar with the most sublime discovery of practical philosophy,—that the real prosperity and happiness of nations depend much more upon the cultivation of moral sentiment, and upon the promotion of the arts of peace, than upon the most brilliant and most successful exertions of martial power.

The advancement of the Romans in civilization and luxury necessarily produced an effect upon the aspect of their religious system. They surrounded it with the attractive charms of the most splendid ceremonies ; and when passions, and sentiments, and virtues which,

at an earlier period, had excited little attention, became more the objects of consideration and reflection, they extended the principle upon which their theology was established, and either clothed abstract ideas with divine existence, or conceived that they were under the protection of some of the deities whom they had been accustomed to revere.

At the time of the introduction of Christianity, the religion of the empire had attained to its most imposing form. The temples of the gods were adorned with the most sumptuous magnificence ; the rites instituted in honour of them were most scrupulously observed ; and, amidst the multiplicity of gods who, agreeably to the spirit and nature of Paganism, had been adopted at Rome, all could find some to whom his inclinations led him to bow down with trust or with hope.

This short history of the natural progress of Paganism, accounts for the universality of its existence ; and when we more minutely examine it, we shall find that it seized upon some of the strongest principles and affections of human nature, and thus established a very powerful influence over the minds of those who embraced it.

To all who have paid any attention to the general features of Paganism, and to the modifications of these which were introduced into the Roman empire, it is apparent, that it was a religion which did not tend extensively to improve the moral character. It was even calculated, from the very structure of it, to relax occasionally the sense of duty, and to countenance vices, against which true religion, zealous for the real happiness of man, employs all its authority.

The gods whom it held forth to the veneration of mankind, had been no doubt distinguished by some displays of heroic or disinterested virtue. But they

had been actuated by the violence, and had yielded to the excesses which universally prevail in the first stages of the progress of man; and they were necessarily strangers to that delicacy, and that enlargement of moral conception, which result from the cultivation of the finer feelings, or from the expansion of the understanding. Their exaltation to heaven, while it immortalized their good qualities, did not consign to oblivion, what should have been forgotten. The vices which had stained their characters had been too faithfully transmitted; and the most devout of their worshippers did not even attempt to deny, that they had, while on earth, been guilty of the most shocking crimes; nay, it was firmly believed by the great body of the people, that even after they had been exalted to heaven, they had sometimes assumed the human form, not, however, to disseminate blessings, and to strengthen virtue, but to perpetrate actions, from the baseness of which every well regulated mind now shrinks with horror.\*

It is at all times difficult, when veneration is sincerely felt, to separate from the virtue which excites it, the vices which should be carefully shunned. What, when viewed in itself, we would not hesitate to condemn, receives, from the excellencies with which it has been associated, a colouring which hides its deformity. This must have been felt, in its utmost force,

\* *Quis locus est templis augustior? haec quoque vitet,  
In culpam si qua est ingeniosa suam.  
Cum steterit Jovis aede, Jovis succurret in aede,  
Quam multas matres fecerit ille Deus.  
Proxima adoranti, Junonia tēpla subibit  
Pellicibis multis hanc doluisse Deam.  
Pallade conspecta, natum de crimine virgo  
Sustulerit quare, quaerit Erichthonium.*

*Ovid. Tristia, b. 2, l. 287.*

by those who worshipped with unfeigned devotion the heathen deities. It was indeed impossible that men could feel much detestation for what they considered as attached to beings whom they adored; that they could greatly hesitate about cherishing dispositions which had found admission into the celestial regions; or, that they could be very apprehensive of the future punishment of enormities, of which the Father of gods and men, upon whom the fate of the human race depended, was himself habitually guilty.

But they were not left merely to infer such lessons from their religious system, these lessons were directly inculcated. The service consecrated to many of their deities was, in the highest degree, immoral and impure; corrupted the most amiable feelings, and laid the foundation of habits most inconsistent with the steady practice of virtue. A religion thus accommodating, must, from this circumstance alone, have been most grateful to the depraved propensities of the heart. In all ages, mankind have endeavoured to reconcile religion with some degree of deviation from duty. We cannot doubt, then, that Paganism, which indulged this propensity, and which did not exhibit faith as uniformly incompatible with vice, would be gladly adopted by that very numerous class of men, who were unable to divest themselves of the natural impressions of religion, but who were unwilling to sacrifice to it their habits and their passions.

It must not, however, be imagined, that Paganism never gave its aid to morality. There are crimes so shocking, that they must be proscribed by every form of religion; so destructive to the peace, or to the very existence of society, that no system, having for its object to cement the social union, can fail to execrate them. But I need scarcely remark, that the admission



of this does not, in any degree, invalidate what has been said concerning the general tendency of heathenism ; about that there can be no doubt.

In the Roman empire there were various causes which conspired with this general one, to excite a very strong attachment to the established theology. The importance of religion has, in all ages, been discerned. It has often, by the wisest legislators, been employed to sanction laws and institutions, to which, without its aid, they apprehended that their subjects would not submit, or to stimulate to exertions which, without its elevating operation, the most heroic courage might have hesitated to attempt. Romulus was not inattentive to the assistance which was to be derived from it. He countenanced, or circulated the report, that he was himself descended from a god ; he professed to assume the sovereignty, in consequence of the intention of heaven plainly discovered to him ; and his first occupation was, to propitiate the deities, who were the guardians of the place on which he laid the foundations of Rome.

In harmony with the policy of their founder, and for the purpose of facilitating the increase of their power, his descendants assumed at least the appearance of the utmost piety and reverence for the gods. They held themselves forth as instruments in their hands for executing the designs of fate ; they ascribed their victories, not merely to the skill of the commanders, or to the bravery of the soldiers who achieved them, but to the interposition of the tutelar divinities of Rome ; and with the most impressive solemnity, by general thanksgivings, awakening most powerfully the feelings of gratitude and devotion, they proclaimed how deeply they were affected by the merciful support which had been vouchsafed to them.

The prosperity and glory of the city, and of the empire, were thus interwoven with the religion of the state ; they were so closely connected, that the people attributed to the gods all which they possessed, and were persuaded, that the moment the divine favour was withdrawn, their power would be finally destroyed. Much care indeed was taken to impress this belief upon their minds. No enterprise was commenced, and no war was declared, till it had been discovered whether the gods were propitious ; the popular assemblies, even when the passions of the citizens were most keenly agitated, were instantly suspended, when an unfavourable omen was announced ; and measures which had appeared in the highest degree calculated to promote the public good, were without hesitation condemned, if they were even suspected to be adverse to the will of their divinities. In seasons of public distress, when pestilence or famine spread misery through the state, solemn deputations were appointed to consult in what manner the gods might be induced to remove them ; and, when defeated by their enemies, they uniformly discovered the omission of some religious ceremony which had awakened the divine indignation, an omission which, with the most public demonstrations of repentance, they instantly remedied.

All this, it must be admitted, was eminently adapted to produce the highest reverence for the national religion, and to excite the utmost horror and detestation against every attempt to vilify or to destroy it.

But paganism drew to its support principles in human nature more powerful, perhaps, than even these which have been mentioned. It came home to the bosom of every man ; he felt its influence in the ordinary intercourse of life, and it was placed before him in those domestic scenes which so much interest the heart.

The desire of penetrating into futurity, has ever existed amongst mankind. Happiness and misery are so often determined by what human foresight is not sufficiently acute to discern; the most judicious schemes are so often unaccountably defeated; and the period which imagination had fixed for the enjoyment of happiness, is so frequently not permitted to arrive, that anxiety to ascertain what is reserved for them, to behold, by anticipation, the issue of their fondest schemes, and to see the limit fixed for their residence in this world, or, for that of those to whom they are most tenderly attached, must occasionally, in some degree, be felt, even by the most enlightened. It can afford then little matter of surprise, that this anxiety has often got the better of reason, and led men, without sufficient reflection, to have recourse to whatever confidently professed to satisfy or to remove it.

The religious system, which prevailed at the introduction of Christianity, had not lost sight of this infirmity, or propensity of our nature. By augury, by oraculous responses, by the flight of birds, and by the appearances which the sacrifices presented, the priests pretended to be enabled to take the veil from the bosom of time, and to unfold the counsels and determinations of heaven. Every external circumstance which could give effect to this claim was provided. The augurs were invested with the highest honour; the most implicit deference was, by all classes of men, paid to them, and the darkness of mystery was cast around them, within which it was destruction to attempt to penetrate. The fallacy of these lofty pretensions, was, no doubt, often experienced; but this never universally suggested the idea that the whole was delusion. They who found themselves mistaken in their hopes of futurity, attributed the mistake to

themselves, to their incapacity to interpret the will of heaven, or to some fault through which they had become unworthy of the divine favour ; and they employed, with undiminished confidence, the same methods which they had been accustomed to practise, whenever they again wished to discover what was reserved for their lot.

I have just further to observe, that the belief in household deities, and the sentiments which were commonly entertained respecting them, were calculated to increase very much the influence of Paganism.

From the multiplicity of gods who were conceived to inhabit the celestial regions, some were selected as the guardians of particular families. To their care and protection the prosperity of the household was ascribed ; in times of distress their assistance was piously invoked ; and deliverance from evil was received and acknowledged as a renewed pledge of their solicitude and favour. The images of these household gods were held in the most religious veneration, and were preserved as the most precious possession. Violence to them was the greatest injury which could be offered to a degraded people, and the father transmitted them to his children, after having fixed in their infant minds the deepest impressions of pious regard.

The effect of this, who can be at a loss to appreciate ? If we look back, with delight, upon our early days ; if amidst the business, and often distressing anxiety of life, the scenes of youth are recollected with a pleasing tenderness, and if the objects which recall to us the friends, the counsellors, the incidents of that happy period can never be beheld with indifference ; how much must these feelings have been heightened by the interposition of religion ? With what emotions would the images be viewed, before which the most illus-

trious ancestors of those who possessed them had poured forth their vows and their supplications, and in the presence of which parental love, never more to be excited, had enumerated the blessings which the beings, thus represented, had for ages bestowed. To tear these delightful associations from the mind, could be no easy task, and they could not fail to press the best affections of the heart into the service of the religion by which they had been formed.

From all these causes, which operated in a greater or less degree wherever Paganism was professed, that religion was eminently adapted to preserve its influence over the human mind. Accordingly, however ridiculous it may now appear to us, who have been blessed with views much more enlightened, the fact is undoubted, that it did very long preserve that influence. In the most polished nations of antiquity, even in Greece itself, the residence of the most profound erudition, and the only country in which literature was extensively diffused through all ranks, the religious creed was, in the highest degree, revered; the slightest reflection against it cancelled every merit, and excited universal detestation and abhorrence.

That this was the case, we have the testimony of Socrates, who knew well the state of the public mind, who was the most enlightened of the ancient philosophers, and the most anxious of them all to draw wisdom from the recesses in which she had been concealed, and to hold her forth to universal admiration.

In a striking passage, he mentions to one of his disciples, that he judged it necessary to wait patiently, till our duty towards God and man should be fully taught; that the minds of men were not, at that time, prepared for such a discovery, but that, by one who had

the tenderest concern for them, the discovery would, at a proper season, be made,

Now, whether it be imagined that Socrates was here obscurely alluding to himself, or, which is more probable, that he was speaking from a persuasion of the insufficiency of all human efforts to introduce right sentiments of the Deity, it is plain, that he considered the conversion of mankind from idolatry, as a work so difficult, that, with every advantage, few would be qualified to undertake it. His death also shows how strong, in his days, was the attachment of the people to their religion. Every person knows, that one part of the accusation which his unprincipled enemies brought against him, was a charge of contemning the gods of the state, or of endeavouring to introduce new deities, and, that he actually fell a sacrifice to the deluded zeal of his countrymen.

It is indeed certain that, when Christianity was published, numbers in the higher classes of society, and almost the whole of those whom we know to have devoted themselves to the study of philosophy, looked with contempt upon the popular faith, or considered it as an emblematical representation of a purer and more elevated theology. But this did not diminish their anxiety for its preservation, and was so far from facilitating its destruction, that it rendered this, if possible, more difficult than it would otherwise have been. These philosophers having lost all reverence for religious truth, or being convinced that it could not be discovered or enforced, regarded the system of religion which the laws established merely as a political engine, productive of the happiest effects to the community. They discerned its influence in giving security to government, and in checking the dreadful ebullitions of popular licentiousness, and, upon these accounts they



supported it, with all the zeal which attachment to interest, and the desires of ambition, surely no weak principles of action, could inspire.

Accordingly, the most eminent philosophers in Rome, notwithstanding their secret sentiments, regularly sacrificed to the gods, and enjoined others to do so ; \* they eagerly canvassed for places in the priesthood, and discharged the duties of it with the most hypocritical solemnity. Even Cicero himself, the brightest luminary of Rome, whose writings abound with the noblest sentiments, and who made the nearest approaches to the purity of natural religion, was a member of the college of augurs, and occasionally left the researches of philosophy, that he might interpret to the deluded people, dreams and prodigies, and oracles ; thus prac-

\* In enjoining the worship of the deities of their country, they imitated the philosophers of Greece, whom, in other respects, they regarded as examples to be carefully followed. Plato inculcates the obligation of revering the gods ; and Cicero, in many passages, speaks expressly in support of this idea. “ *A patribus acceptos Deos placet coli.*” In another place, he compares observance of this practice with the conduct of those who acted differently, and he gives a decided preference to that which he so frequently had inculcated. “ *Nec sequor Magos Persarum, quibus auctoribus, Xerxes inflammasse templa Græciæ dicitur, quod parietibus includerent Deos quorum hic mundus omnis templum esset, et domus. Melius Græci atque nostri, qui ut augerent pietatem in Deos, easdem illos quas nos urbes incolere voluerunt.*” Epictetus, who lived after the introduction of Christianity, has also advised to sacrifice according to the established custom.

These, and similar quotations, may be found in the notes to Dr. Clarke's invaluable work upon the Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion, a work which, in my estimation, no one can seriously read without being deeply impressed by it.

tising dissimulation from which his own maxims of morality might have restrained him.

That men, in such a state of mind, must have been more averse to the dissemination of new religious opinions than even the bigotted multitude, we might, independently of the fact, have, with much probability, concluded ; and that this was really the case is apparent from the progress of Christianity, which was at first almost universally rejected by those who were not prepossessed in favour of the truth of the established religion, and was cordially embraced by those who had been most strongly attached to that religion. \*

\* The sentiments of the philosophers respecting the established religion, have given rise to the opinion that its influence over the great body of the people was, at the period of Christ's appearance, very much diminished, and that, consequently, Christianity was not opposed by the strength of religious prepossession. This opinion rests upon the ground, that it was impossible that the people could know that men in higher ranks, and even in the priesthood, despised the faith of their country, without imbibing the same disrespect for it. But the infidelity of the higher ranks was perhaps not quite so extensive as is commonly imagined. I recollect that Cicero mentions, in some of his epistles, one man of learning who sincerely believed in the established religion ; and there may have been many more, who, from not having published their inquiries to the world, are unknown to posterity. Admitting, however, that infidelity was very general, it is not clear that the people were aware of this. The philosophers, as was stated in the last note, were very careful to conceal their real principles, and for this purpose, both recommended and practised the rites of Paganism. But it may at once be observed, that the attachment of the multitude to the religion of their fathers, was not, to any degree, destroyed ; and this may be very satisfactorily shown, not by vague reasoning, or by the hasty assumption of theory, but by what is of much more value, a series of positive facts. Cicero, in his orations, often intro-

From the whole of this illustration I trust it has appeared, that there existed the most formidable obstacles to the reception of any religion whatever, different from that which was established.

duces the most eloquent allusions to the popular superstition. These, he certainly supposed calculated to make an impression upon his audience, which, he must have known would not be the case had they who heard him been alienated from the established religion. After the death of Julius Cæsar, his friends were eager to pay him divine honours. This Cicero and the adherents to liberty were anxious to prevent, because they believed that the veneration for the memory of Cæsar would thus be so much increased, as to turn the popular fury against themselves. Such an apprehension is an indirect, but a very strong proof, that the principles of Paganism were firmly fixed in the minds of the great part of their fellow-citizens. The younger Pliny had earnestly requested that Trajan would confer upon him the office, either of Augur or Septemvir; and he thus expressed himself when the Emperor did admit him into the college of Augurs:—"My advancement to the dignity of an Augur is indeed an honour that justly merits the congratulation you give me, (he is writing to a friend,) not only as it is highly glorious to receive, even in the slightest instances, a testimony of the approbation of so wise and judicious a prince, but as it is also an ancient and a sacred institution." He would not have written in this manner had the opinion which I am considering been well founded, because, as this office derived all its splendour and all its consequence and dignity from the religion of the state, if the reverence for this had been lost, the office must have fallen into contempt, more especially as the duties of it were regularly performed. The Emperor Augustus, certainly not from the weakness of vanity, but from the desire of acquiring greater influence over the public mind, affected to be descended from the gods, and attached to himself the superintendence of religion; and the deification of the emperors would have been ludicrous, if the principles upon which it was founded had been by all rejected and despised. Pliny, in one of his letters, mentions, that, in consequence of the advice of the Aruspices, he was to rebuild

This is of much importance to the argument. Had it been ascertained that the great body of the people in Rome, and through the empire, were indifferent about the religion of the state, and that, hav-

and enlarge a temple of Ceres, which stood upon his estate ; and that he had been induced to think of this, because, at a stated time every year, multitudes assembled at it, when many vows were paid and offered, so that he was convinced that he would thus do an act of munificence and piety. This letter shows, that even the philosophers, either from the influence of superstition, which sometimes lurks in the breasts of those who most severely, and most convincingly, declaim against it, or out of compliance with established custom, were in the practice of occasionally consulting the Aruspices, and that a considerable time after the publication of Christianity, great numbers upon the estate of Pliny, and in his neighbourhood, were regular in offering vows to Ceres. It is certain, that a regard to omens kept its ground long after this period ; and, from some parts of Pliny's epistles, it is apparent that he had not sufficient strength of mind always to disregard them. I shall state another fact which throws much light upon the subject. During the struggles of Vespasian to obtain undisputed possession of the empire, the capitol, dedicated to Jupiter, and rendered venerable by traditions most gratifying to the people, was consumed by fire. Consternation was instantly spread through the empire, originating from a persuasion that this was an omen of the approaching destruction of Rome. To efface this impression, the emperor rebuilt the temple, and Tacitus, in the fourth book of his history, has given a very particular account of the commencement of this great work. I shall not transcribe the passage, but I may safely observe from it, that it is impossible to read it with attention without perceiving how erroneous is the idea that Paganism was generally regarded as an exploded religion. These facts, which are only a very few of what might have been mentioned, are perhaps sufficient completely to establish the conclusion in the text, that Christianity had, in the Gentile world, to struggle against prejudices of religion, and to show with how much caution the most plausible general observations upon a subject of

ing ceased to be useful in assisting the administration of government, all support had been withdrawn from it, although even this, as might be shown, would have had little effect upon the propagation of

this nature ought to be admitted. But before finishing this note, it may be proper particularly to advert to the sentiments of the celebrated author of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and to inquire more at large than could have been done in the body of the work, whether, upon the supposition of an universal disregard to Paganism, we could, from principles of human nature, infer, that Christianity would be more readily embraced? Mr. Gibbon, it is well known, has laboured to prove, or to speak more accurately, has confidently asserted, that Paganism had lost its influence over the public mind, and that if Christianity had not appeared, some other religion would probably soon have supplanted the worship of Jupiter. Yet it may be evident to any one who attentively reads his history, that many passages directly contradict his favourite speculation. I shall rest satisfied with adverting to a very remarkable one. The Emperor Maximin stripped the temples of their treasures, and melted the statues of the gods. If polytheism had been universally ridiculed, or if the people had been totally estranged from it, this action of the emperor could have excited little emotion, or rather, must have been regarded as resulting from principles of the soundest policy? Yet what was the consequence, as Mr. Gibbon himself has described it? These impious orders, he says, could not be executed without tumults and massacres, as in many places the people chose rather to die in defence of their altars, than to behold, in the midst of peace, their cities exposed to the rapine and cruelty of war. In the very chapter in which he represents the decaying energy of Paganism, he gives a most eloquent and impressive picture of its amiable and beneficent nature, representing it as having so completely, in every situation, directed the conduct, that the primitive Christians found infinite difficulty in preserving themselves uncontaminated by its pollution.

But if the people were thoroughly convinced of the absurdity of their religion, and were so indifferent about its fate as to be

Christianity, it might have been with some appearance of reason concluded, that a field was open for any judicious impostor, who, by artfully arranging a set of opinions, might have turned to his advantage that propen-

ready for the reception of any new opinions, how shall we account for the persecution which so early, and with so much severity, was directed against the Christians. Mr. Gibbon is struck with the difficulty. To get rid of it, in some degree, he endeavours to impress his readers with the idea, that very exaggerated notions upon this subject were generally entertained; and perplexed by that passage of his favourite, Tacitus, which not only gives the most shocking account of the tortures to which the professors of Christianity were subjected, but expresses the utmost antipathy at that religion, he hazards, what he himself admits to be only a conjecture, that the historian was not speaking of the Christians. But after making every deduction which he could wish to be made, and silently passing over his conjecture, which even he would have felt little zeal to defend, the difficulty exists in the most formidable strength. He accordingly found himself compelled to account for it, and he most ingeniously attributes the persecution to this circumstance, that the professors of Christianity had departed from the religion of their fathers, a circumstance which the people, as he tells us, regarded with abhorrence. It might be remarked, as I shall have occasion afterwards to show, that there is little reason for believing that the Romans had accurately discriminated between Judaism and Christianity; and it must be apparent that this explanation could scarcely have been expected from Mr. Gibbon, who had been just attempting to produce the conviction that the inhabitants of the empire were ready to abandon the religion which their fathers had transmitted to them. Without enlarging upon these points, I would only observe, that whatever was the state of the public mind with regard to the established faith, we may, upon the authority of Mr. Gibbon, affirm, that Christianity derived from this no advantage; and that it was, in fact, regarded by the inhabitants of the empire with contempt and abhorrence.

But upon the supposition that the great body of the people



sity of the human race to religion, which nothing can universally eradicate, and persuaded numbers that he was a messenger from Heaven. The actual state of the heathen world cuts off every suspicion of this kind,

had really become indifferent to their religion, it may not be unimportant to inquire, whether the inference commonly deduced from this justly follows from it, and to determine what, upon the principles of human nature, might be expected to have been the effect produced upon the reception of a new religion. The Romans were, for ages, a religious people, piously attached to their faith; it was not till after the destruction of Carthage, and the influx of immense wealth from tributary nations, that their manners were corrupted, and that the practical disregard of religion, which licentiousness never fails to bring with it, was created. Now, if from any cause whatever, this effect of licentiousness was counteracted, and the people were led to follow the impulse of the religious propensity interwoven in our nature, what would have resulted from it? They would not, like barbarous nations, who had never been attached to a peculiar system, have embraced any religion which might be offered to them, but they would have recurred to their ancient faith, with reverence to which they associated their prosperity; they would have been inspired with sincere sorrow for having disregarded it, and would have gone from one extreme to the other. And this, from Mr. Gibbon's statement, we may assert was actually the case. Soon after the introduction of Christianity, he informs us, that the zeal for Paganism, which had been weakened or extinguished, was renewed or strengthened; the philosophers shared the general enthusiasm, and lent their aid to support the theology of their ancestors. Even after Christianity had become the religion of the empire, many literary men argued in defence of Paganism, and the Roman senate petitioned that the images which they had been accustomed to revere, they might be permitted to retain. From the whole of this long note, which the interesting nature of the subject, and its intimate connection with the truth of Christianity, have led me to extend, I think it may be obvious, with how little truth it has been asserted, that

and places it beyond a doubt, that some very powerful cause was requisite for overthrowing a religious system which had, for ages, been established ; which the authority of the state carefully protected ; and which so many other circumstances endeared to those who had been educated to revere it.

## SECTION II.

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, SO FAR FROM BEING CALCULATED TO DESTROY THE ATTACHMENT TO THOSE RELIGIONS WHICH IT FOUND EXISTING AMONGST MANKIND, MUST NATURALLY, FROM ITS DOCTRINES, FROM ITS SPIRIT, AND FROM ALL THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH ATTENDED ITS PUBLICATION, HAVE RATHER STRENGTHENED THAT ATTACHMENT, AND MUST HAVE BEEN VIEWED AS SUBVERTING WHATSOEVER HAD BEEN ESTEEMED SACRED, AND AS INTRODUCING THE MOST ALARMING INNOVATIONS.

THE great doctrine of Christianity, which more obviously distinguished it from other religions, and which was therefore immediately proposed by those who taught it, is the unity of God. He was declared to be the author, the governor, the preserver of the universe, the only object of religious worship and adoration ; while to reverence other beings as gods, was represented as a crime which, in all who had access to

the religious state of the empire facilitated the diffusion of the Gospel, or, in other words, we are conducted to this plain conclusion, that we must seek, in the positive evidence of our religion, for the only satisfactory cause of its rapid and extensive diffusion.

become acquainted with the Gospel, divine justice would with severity punish. This at once overturned all the received notions of deity, and sanctioned a mode of worship in direct contradiction to that which had been universally practised.

If then, the slightest innovations in religious sentiment are so apt to excite the most violent opposition, and to kindle the most ardent zeal against those who endeavour to introduce them, can it be doubted that Christianity, which swept away all their opinions of religion, would produce this effect upon those Gentiles to whom it was addressed?

It has been often very justly observed, that it requires an unusual degree of candour, and perhaps a very vigorous exertion of the understanding, not to confound the abjuration of what are really prejudices of religion, with want of regard to religion itself. The observation is here applicable in all its force. When the Gentiles heard the deities whom they had piously revered, held forth as imaginary beings, it was not unnatural to conclude, that the persons who entertained such an opinion, had no faith in the existence of any god, and that they were the propagators of atheism, the most gloomy and depressing of all doctrines, and from which the human race, in every stage of refinement, have revolted with horror. And this was really the case. The Christians were very universally, through the Pagan world, conceived to be atheists; they were often reproached with being so; and how much detestation thus was excited, may be collected from the anxiety displayed by the first defenders of Christianity to evince the absurdity and the falsehood of the imputation.

It has indeed been insinuated, that, from the occasional adoption of new deities, it would seem that the

inhabitants of the empire were not very strongly attached to any peculiar views of religion, and that they might, with the same facility with which they had agreed to venerate the gods of the nations which they subdued, have been inclined to revere the true God.

Could it have been shown that they were of one religion to-day, and of another to-morrow, successively giving their assent to contradictory systems of faith, there might have been some ground for the insinuation ; at least their conversion could have afforded no presumption of the truth of what they embraced. But the fact is, that the enlargement of the catalogue of deities was in perfect harmony with the fundamental principles of Paganism, and was no more the adoption of a new religion, than it would be in the Popish church to add a saint to the calendar, or a relic to the sacred collection. It may then be admitted, that they were ever ready to pay homage to strange gods, while it is affirmed that they must have abhorred Christianity, which was totally incompatible with their previous sentiments, because it not merely commanded them to believe in God, but to turn from the vain idols, in veneration for which they had been educated.

But it may be remarked that, from the laws and history of Rome, it is apparent that no foreign worship was permitted till it had received the sanction of the senate ; for they who, without proper authority, introduced changes upon established rites, were frequently punished, and these changes always proscribed. This care of the religion of the state, was indeed a fundamental part of the constitution and government, a regard to which probably influenced some of those humane emperors, who, inconsistently with the usual spirit of their administration, employed the most unjust persecution against the followers of Jesus.

Another part of Christianity, which was immediately announced to the Gentiles, was no less calculated to incline them to view it with contempt, and of course to reject it, I allude to the humble condition, to the sufferings and death of its author, who notwithstanding was declared to be the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world.

The situation of Jesus was unquestionably not the one which human wisdom would have previously assigned to a messenger from heaven. He was born in the extremity of poverty; the early part of his life was spent in the lowest obscurity; and even after he began his ministry, he had not, to adopt his own expression, where to lay his head. After a succession of calamities, he was condemned as a criminal, and was executed upon a cross. Could this person, it was natural to ask, be authorised by that Omnipotent Being who, according to his own assertion, could have placed him on the throne of the world, and inclined all nations to submit to his dominion?

Men are very apt to form their notions upon a subject of this kind from analogy, and to reason from the conduct of earthly sovereigns to that of the King of Kings. What monarch would commit a most important charge to a subject in the humblest rank of life, or could fail to perceive how much the dignity and magnificence of his servant must increase his influence, and tend to give success to his mission. Would not a messenger of God, upon the same principles, bear the ensign of divine glory, and thus, from external situation, induce men with reverence to listen to him. Such reasoning would, I think, be naturally suggested to those who first heard of Christianity, and would, by the great part of mankind, be considered as unanswerable.

The ideas which, among the heathens, were entertained of divine communications, would, in their estimation, increase its strength. They too believed, that the gods occasionally held converse with mortals, directing the conduct of those whom they wished to preserve from danger, or to exalt to honour; but they assigned to them, when they did appear, a degree of splendour which man could not assume; and even when they represented them as wishing to conceal their divinity, they accompanied what they said with an energy, or ascribed to their interference an influence, which uniformly, before they left the scene, removed all doubts concerning their celestial origin.

How much, then, must the great body of the people, in Gentile nations, have been disposed to despise or to ridicule a religion which taught that a man who had been insulted by the populace, and had at length been put to death, with the permission of a Roman governor, was the Son of God, and the Saviour of men.

That they were actually struck with this circumstance, as being inconsistent with his pretensions, may be inferred from those passages which have been already quoted from their historians, by which it appears that, ignorant as they were in many respects of Christianity, they had learnt, that he from whom it originated, had been publicly executed.

When we turn from the situation of Jesus to survey his conduct, and the general features of his character, there will be discovered additional matter of offence to the Gentiles, particularly to those of them who dwelt in the countries adjacent to the seat of empire.

It was not unusual, about the period at which Jesus appeared, to enrol amongst the gods distinguished individuals; several of the emperors were exalted to heaven, and divine honours were regularly paid to



them. But when the people were sincere in the homage which they presented, for that homage was often the incense of the most worthless flattery, it was occasioned by the possession of virtues very different from those which Jesus practised.

Had he, according to the expectation of the Jews, emerged as a powerful sovereign ; and had the fame of his valour, the terror of his conquests, and the extent of his devastations, astonished the nations, whatever had been his origin, he would have secured the admiration of those who conceived that such achievements evidenced true greatness of mind ; and his religion, recommended or enforced by the sword, would, as has happened in less remote periods, have been extensively diffused. But he exhibited those meek retiring virtues which, though they do not excite the rapturous applause of the multitude, exalt human nature, and extend human felicity ; he felt for the misery of the wretched ; he delighted to alleviate the grief of the mourner ; and he acted, at all times, under impressions of piety and of resignation to the divine will, producing conduct, which would readily be ascribed by those who heard of it, to the feebleness of pusillanimity. Although he was insulted, he felt no desire to retaliate ; he was never guided by revenge ; he forgot in the hour of their misfortune, the enmity of his persecutors ; and even, when they were putting him to death, and aggravating the severity of torture, by the most inhuman exultation over it, with an effort of fortitude truly great, and from feelings of mercy which ennoble humanity, he withdrew his attention from the agony which he endured, that he might close his life interceding for their forgiveness.

To us, the direction of whose sentiments has been much changed by Christianity, such conduct appears in

its proper light, and even they who have attached themselves to infidelity generally join in the admiration of it. But the case was very different in the ancient world, when submission to insult was in every case reprobated as cowardice, and when compassion to an enemy was regarded as incompatible with the dignity of human nature.

The Christian religion must also naturally have excited opposition, and thus obstructed its own progress, by the enlarged morality which it inculcates, and by those conditions which it represents as essential for procuring the divine favour.

There is nothing to which mankind in all ages have shown a more decided aversion, than to restrain the violence of passion ; to eradicate habits which had long fettered the mind ; and to regulate their actions by a standard essentially different from that which they had been accustomed to use. To avoid the necessity of doing this, or, which is the same thing, to reconcile with the hope of happiness hereafter, much remissness in moral exertion upon earth, religious opinions have often been adopted, which otherwise the understanding would at once have rejected ; and the tendency of any religion to gratify this hope, to cherish sinful inclination, or to extenuate the criminality of its indulgence, must be considered as capable of exerting a strong influence, and of producing an inclination to embrace it in those attached to the vices which it tolerates.

Christianity, however, derived from such accommodation to human frailty no support. It made no sacrifices to conciliate the affections and the passions, but, at the time of what, in one point of view, may be regarded as its lowest depression, when struggling against the powers of the world, and upheld by the exertions

of a few illiterate men, it unequivocally taught, that unless piety and benevolence, justice and temperance and purity were revered and practised, no one was entitled to assume the name of a Christian, or to consider himself as actuated by the spirit of Christianity.

All then, to whom this religion was proposed for acceptance, must have at once perceived that there was no alternative to those who were converted, and that unless they were determined to become such as it required them to be, acting upon every occasion agreeably to the suggestions of enlightened conscience, they only, by their conversion, put their own seal to their condemnation, and could have no hope that they would inherit the blessings promised to the faithful.

This surely was by no means calculated to gain the estimation of mankind, or to soften the prejudices which from other causes they entertained ; indeed it is apparent, from what has been said, that it must have had just an opposite effect, and must have proved a very formidable obstacle to the general reception of Christianity.

Can it be imagined that, in a luxurious and dissolute age, the inclination to renounce luxury, and the vices connected with it, would be so strong, that the moment men were called upon to renounce them, they would cheerfully do so ; or that they would forsake the religion which had been transmitted to them, and which connived, at least to a certain extent, at moral relaxation, in order to adopt, as the religion of heaven, by which their eternal fate was to be decided, a doctrine which, for ought they knew, was entirely destitute of evidence, but which certainly made no allowance for their vices, and which not resting satisfied, even with external conformity to its precepts, but piercing into the heart, declared, that unless it was pure, and the de-

sires were strictly regulated, it was impossible to see God.\*

This, however, is very far from being the full strength of the case. What is believed to be wrong, men, however averse to do so, may at some period of

\* That the manners of Rome and the adjacent countries were, at the period when Christianity penetrated into the empire, very licentious, is evident from the testimony of the writers of that age, and indeed from the whole of its history. I transcribe a few lines from the 13th Satire of Juvenal, in which, with the utmost energy of expression, he paints the prevalence of dissoluteness and immorality; and although some allowance must be made for the strong colouring of a satirist, who entertained the utmost detestation at vice, it cannot be doubted that there was much moral depravity in the objects from which he drew.

“ Quæ tam festa dies ut cesset prodere furem,  
Perfidium, fraudes, atque omni ex crimine lucrum  
Quæsitum, et partos gladio vel pyxide nummos?  
Rari quippe boni : numero vix sunt totidem, quot  
Thebarum portæ, vel divitis ostia Nili.  
Nunc si depositum non inficietur amicus,  
Si reddat veterem cum tota ærugine follem,  
Prodigiosa fides, et Thuscis digna libellis,  
Quæque coronata lustrari debeat agna.  
Egregium sanctumque virum si cerno, bimembri  
Hoc monstrum puero, et miranti jam sub aratro  
Piscibus inventis, et fætæ comparo mulæ.”

Juvenal is supposed to have written during the reign, either of Domitian or Trajan. The fact which these lines establish is of importance to the argument, because, in proportion as the love of virtue is lost, will be the antipathy to a religion teaching the necessity of renewing it. If, therefore, such a religion has, in fact, drawn many from vice, and established them in virtue, it may be inferred, that some strong cause overcame the repugnance to embrace it, and enabled it to produce such a revolution in sentiment and conduct.

life, from various causes, strive to renounce. But what was the situation in which Christianity found the far greater part of the Gentiles who were converted to it? They were addicted to the most seducing vices, not only without the smallest suspicion that criminality ought to be attached to them, but not unfrequently under the conviction that, by the commission of them, they honoured some of the deities, whose polluted rites were sanctioned and enforced by religion. Christianity, therefore, not only proscribed what was previously believed to be wrong, but it exhibited the sphere of duty very much enlarged. It represented as offensive to the Creator, and as disgraceful to human nature, practices which had been incorporated with what was conceived to be the innocent enjoyment of life, and from which the most scrupulous guardian would not have restrained the youth whom he directed.

This was most forbidding, and could not fail to interest the passions against Christianity, inducing men to regard it as a gloomy austere system, unnecessarily abridging human happiness, and thus evincing the contracted notions of those who proposed it. Let us bring the case home to ourselves. If any religion were now published as derived from Heaven, which taught, that the pleasures of friendship, for example, were inconsistent with our duty, and that we should separate from those with whom we delight to associate, we should either consider this circumstance as justifying us in paying little attention to the religion, or we should anxiously examine whether it really was what it was asserted to be, before we made the painful sacrifice which it required. Christianity was to the Gentiles just such a religion as that which I have mentioned would be to us. It prohibited what was regard-

ed as innocent, or as essential to happiness ; and we may therefore draw the same conclusion, that men would, on this account, be prejudiced against it, or would not be disposed blindly to assent to it.

It is still farther to be observed, that Christianity not only required the most radical reformation of the heart and life, condemning as criminal what was believed to be indifferent and innocent ; but that it depreciated what, in the heathen world, and more particularly through the Roman empire, was considered as the most exalted virtue. It at least restrained dispositions which the whole system of education was framed to cherish ; upon the prevalence of which depended very much the degree of estimation attached to the character, and which had given rise to those exertions to which Rome was indebted for the pre-eminence which she enjoyed above the nations of the world.

It requires very little reflection upon the constitution of human nature, to enable us to estimate the aversion which mankind entertain to review past life with feelings quite different from those with which they had been accustomed to review it ; or to look upon actions which had produced the utmost complacency of mind, which had attracted the respect or the admiration of others, and the recollection of which had ever been a source of much satisfaction, as really deserving no approbation, or as inferior, in a moral point of view, to actions which the humblest often performed, and which had never been considered as entitled to commendation. Yet that this must have been the case with the Gentiles who were converted to Christianity is very evident.

That love of glory which so often extinguished private attachment, which occasionally stifled the feelings of nature and of humanity, which rendered those who



were actuated by it careless of danger, and determined them to promote the honour of their country by whatever means that could be accomplished, received no express sanction from the law of the gospel, and the spirit of that religion rather tended to check than to foster it. But meekness, forbearance, forgiveness of injuries, and benevolence not limited in its operation by national distinction, virtues requiring, in fact, much resolution, although often represented as inconsistent with strength of mind, were urged, upon all who received Christianity, as essential for possessing peace of conscience, and for obtaining the rewards promised to obedience.

Thus, then, I think it is apparent, that the Christian religion, in itself, was little calculated to destroy the attachment which, by the great body of the people in heathen countries, was so strongly felt for the religion in which they had been educated, and that the peculiar doctrines which constituted the most prominent features of the gospel, and the precepts which were necessarily connected with the doctrines, must have been viewed in the precise light in which one of the sacred writers mentions that they were viewed, as foolishness ; appearing inconsistent, not only with the prejudices of the vulgar, but with the maxims of the wise, and with those sentiments of morality which philosophy sanctioned. This, therefore, must have operated against its reception, and must, independently of other causes, have disposed men to reject it, or, at all events, minutely to examine its evidence before they acknowledged it to be a divine revelation.

This obvious conclusion will acquire additional strength, if it be found that the circumstances which attended the introduction of Christianity conspired

with the spirit of it in creating an aversion to its reception, or in disposing men to reject it.

In directing our attention to the introduction of Christianity, with a view to determine whether the circumstances connected with it had a tendency to facilitate or retard its progress, we are naturally led to inquire into the situation and character of those who propagated it, and into the immediate consequences resulting from its profession.

Although truth should be abstractly viewed, because no adventitious circumstances, or no accidental associations can at all alter or affect it, it is undoubted that the judgment is very much influenced by such circumstances and associations, and that, through the excitement of different principles of our nature, the understanding is often misled, receiving insensibly such a bias as to give its assent to what, without this bias, would have been readily discovered to be erroneous. Had Christianity, then, been announced to the heathen world by men of distinguished eminence, whose former meritorious conduct had raised them in the public estimation, or established an influence over the public mind, whatever had been its doctrines, and however inconsistent with the opinions, the habits, and the practices of those to whom it was proposed, esteem for the persons who did propose it, confidence in their discernment, or in the honesty of their intentions, and a persuasion that they enjoyed every means of acquiring certainty with regard to it, might have led many to hesitate, or might even, previously to inquiry, have created an inclination to believe. In like manner, if the profession of it had either necessarily or accidentally been connected with that which mankind naturally wish to acquire, opening the road to ease, to afflu-

ence, or to honour, the love of these, and the desire to possess them might, without their influence being perceptible, have rendered the understanding most accommodating, and might have united to the church numbers who really imagined that they were sincere, not aware that they were dazzled rather than convinced.

But the Christian religion, as is well known, enjoyed none of these advantages, or, to speak more properly, was communicated in a manner much more suitable to the divinity of its origin. It proposed truth in its real form, surrounding it with no meretricious ornaments to seduce to the reception of it. The apostles, taken from the lowest classes of society, were, with the exception of St Paul, who, however, at least after his conversion, was as poor as any of his brethren, strangers to those accomplishments which captivate the multitude, and unacquainted with the graces of eloquence, or with that literature, the love of which was, in their days, very extensively diffused. They raised their voice from the shade of obscurity, and thence called upon the human race to believe in the doctrines which they taught. The natural consequence of this would be, either that they would be entirely disregarded, or that they would be considered as men guided by a warm or distempered imagination, whose sentiments it was not necessary even to examine.

If a poor illiterate man, in the most enlightened nation of modern Europe, should attempt to introduce a new religion, subversive of all which is esteemed sacred, and if he performed no action which, from the peculiarity of its nature commanded attention, I think it will be universally admitted, that his situation and appearance, independently of what he taught, and previously to any consideration of it, would determine the

public opinion against him. The same thing, it is most reasonable to suppose, would have happened in the case of the apostles, had they simply asked men to believe, without assigning any evidence to incline them to do so ; that is, had they left their doctrine to rest entirely upon its own merit, or to make its way by natural causes amongst them.

But the prejudice which would be excited against the first propagators of Christianity, from their poverty, and the meanness of their appearance, was heightened by the circumstance that they were Jews.

The Jews, several ages before the birth of Christ, had formed establishments in countries which, at the period of which I now speak, had been incorporated with the Roman Empire, and had even settled themselves, in considerable numbers, in Rome itself. Their religious worship, so unlike that of all the people amongst whom they resided, and the peculiarity of their ceremonial observances, and of some of those customs and practices which their religion enjoined, combined with their own stubborn and unaccommodating spirit, and with that abhorrence at idolatry, and of all who were attached to it, which, from the æra of the Babylonish captivity, they had unceasingly felt, and, without any caution expressed, had excited against them universal hatred. They were every where treated with the utmost indignity ; they were ridiculed, such is the inconsistency of human nature, by those who had the most erroneous notions of religion, for their superstition, and their credulity was proverbial. That this is an accurate statement of the fact, every one who is acquainted with the history of the Jews will readily admit ; and indeed it is proved by the writings of the most distinguished Roman satirists, by incidental expressions in many

ancient authors, and by the account which Tacitus has given of this singular people.\*

\* As the remark just made is of considerable importance in showing, that unless Christianity had possessed some external evidence which appeared satisfactory, it must naturally have been despised and rejected, I shall subjoin a few passages, which will illustrate and establish it. Horace, in the ninth satire of his first book, puts this sarcastic question into the mouth of a friend, who designed to torment him. “*Vin'tu curtis Judæis oppedere?*” The language is very contemptuous, but the degree in which it is so, will be best perceived by looking at the passage in which it occurs. That they were esteemed very credulous, is apparent from another allusion to them by the same writer. After having mentioned something ridiculously incredible, he subjoins “*Credat Judæus Apella.*” Cicero has also expressed the general opinion entertained respecting them, and their religious sentiments. “*Sua cuique civitati religio est Læli, nostra nobis. Stantibus Hierosolymis, pacatisque Judæis tamen istorum religio sacrorum a splendore hujus imperii, gravitate nominis nostri, majorum institutis abhorrebat; nunc vero hoc magis quod illa gens quid de imperio nostro sentiret ostendit armis; quam cara immortalibus diis esset, docuit quod est victa, quod elocata, quod servata.*” *CICERO pro L. Flacco.* Suetonius, in his life of Augustus, has mentioned a circumstance which shows the abhorrence which was entertained at the Jewish religion: “*Cajum nepotem quod Judæam pertervehens apud Hierosolymam non supplicasset collaudavit.*” These quotations abundantly illustrate the sentiments which were common with regard to the Jews before the introduction of Christianity; those which I am to add, will prove that they were not changed after Christianity was known through the empire.

“*Quidam sortiti metuentem sabbata patrem,  
 “ Nil præter nubes, et cœli numeri adorant;  
 “ Nec distare putant humanâ carne suillam,  
 “ Quâ pater abstinuit; mox et præputia ponunt.  
 “ Romanas autem soliti contemnere leges,  
 “ Judaicum ediscunt, et servant, ac metuunt jus,*

When, then, the apostles preached through the empire, as they did not conceal that they were Jews, it

“ Tradidit arcano quodcunque volumine Moses :

“ Non monstrare vias, eadem nisi sacra colenti ;

“ Quæsitum ad fontem, solos deducere verpos.

“ Sed pater in causâ, cui septima quæque fuit lux

“ Ignava, et partem non attigit ullam.

— JUV. SAT. 14.

“ Et vetus indulget senibus clementia porcis.

JUV. SAT. 6th.

Tacitus, in the fifth book of his history, has given a dissertation upon the origin, the customs, and the religion of the Jews. With some truth there is mingled much false representation, which he probably adopted, without sufficient inquiry, and which is often so incredible, and so inconsistent with what he admits to be fact, that we must ascribe the insertion of it to a strong bias against the people of whom he treats. A few extracts will show what were his ideas, and what the ideas of his countrymen, respecting Jewish rites, and practices, and character. “ *Novos ritus, contrariosque ceteris mortalibus, indidit. Profana illic omnia quæ apud nos sacra. Hi ritus, quoquo modo inducti, antiquitate defenduntur ; cetera instituta sinistra, fœda, pravitate valere. Nam pessimus quisque, spretis religionibus patriis, tributa et stipes illuc congerebant. Apud ipsos fides obstinata, misericordia in promptu, sed adversus omnes alios hostile odium. Nec quidquam prius imbuuntur, quam contemnere divos, exuere patriam : parentes, liberos, fratres, vilia habere. Sue abstinent, memoriâ cladis, quod ipsos scabies quondam turpaverat, cui id animal obnoxium.*”

These passages, taken from different writers living at different periods, render it evident that the Jews were, before and after the Christian æra, universally hated and despised, and that this hatred and contempt originated from the diversity which subsisted between the Jewish religion and other religions, from the forbidding manners of the Jews, and from those peculiar customs which, in the estimation of the heathen, were, in the



might naturally be conceived, that they were announcing either their ancient religion, which had been uniformly regarded as superstition, and had, on that account, been neglected or derided, or some modification of it equally contemptible; and they who heard it, would be disposed, with much scorn, to apply to it the remark of Horace, *Credat Judæus Apella*. This was the obvious consequence of their publishing a religious doctrine; and how powerfully this must have operated in retarding the progress of Christianity, will be perceived by reflecting upon the astonishing influence of national antipathy, even in cases where it is much more weakly felt than it was against the Jews.

That Christianity was long confounded with Judaism, by those who did not, by examination, investigate the difference, is a certain fact; and it was probably from this view of it, that it was so often mentioned in a manner which the bitterest of its enemies, who had attended to it, would not have adopted.

As the Christian religion thus derived no assistance from the situation of those who proposed it, so it can scarcely be doubted, that it must have been obstructed

highest degree, ridiculous. Hatred and contempt were also aggravated by what was considered as the rebellious spirit of the Jews, that people taking every opportunity of asserting their liberty, and of expressing their detestation of the Roman yoke. From all this, the conclusion which I have stated plainly follows, that Christianity could have been published to the world by no class of men less likely to promote it. When contempt and hatred exert united influence, they certainly produce a state of mind most unfavourable to dispassionate inquiry into what those against whom these feelings are entertained may teach, and indispose for the cordial acceptation of truth, repugnant to religious and deep rooted prejudice.

by the persecution and suffering which attended the profession of it.

It had been known for a very short time in the empire before the civil power was directed against it, and kindled persecution no less formidable than that which it had encountered in Judea. The emperors, notwithstanding the tolerant principles which have been so liberally ascribed to them, issued the most rigorous edicts against the unfortunate Christians. They were apprehended upon the most vague, often upon anonymous information ; they were put to the torture in conformity with that shocking policy which sought, in this way, to elicit truth ; and if they did not invoke the gods, or pay religious homage to the statue of the reigning prince, however scrupulously they had discharged the duties of a citizen, and however respectable by private worth, they were most cruelly punished. Even Trajan, one of the most amiable of the emperors, although he did not wish, that, without distinct information, they should be harassed, and although he remitted punishment upon their abjuration of Christ, still demanded that abjuration, and required, that if they could not conscientiously make it, they should suffer.\* If, then, it was evident to all to whom Christianity was addressed, that by giving their assent to it, they would infallibly expose themselves to much pain and misery, can we hesitate to admit, upon the best ascertained principles of human nature, that this circumstance must have prevented rashness in adopting it, and increased very powerfully the effect of those other causes which prejudiced them against it. And that they did,

\* See passage of Pliny, already quoted, and the answer of Trajan to the letter containing it.

in fact, know that such would be the consequence of conversion cannot be doubted, because the law and practice of their country assured them of it, because they saw Christians daily tormented or put to death, and because they were told by the persons who enjoined them to believe, that temporal calamity might be expected as the portion of all who were converted.\*

Thus, I trust, it has appeared that Christianity, from its leading principles and doctrines, and from the most striking circumstances which accompanied it, was so little calculated to shake belief in the established religion, and through its own intrinsic excellence to spread itself in the world, that it must naturally have been viewed with abhorrence. If, then, it was indebted for its success to any thing independent of its external evidence, it must have been to some part of its doctrine, or to some of the practices permitted or enjoined by it, which counteracted its general tendency, and the effect of the manner in which it appeared. Whether this was the case, the next section is devoted to ascertain.

\* Livy has put the following passage into the mouth of one of the Consuls who addressed the people, a passage decisive as to the ancient law and practice of Rome; while the actual persecution of the Christians, even by Trajan, shows that this part of the constitution had not, in later times, become obsolete: "Quoties hoc patrum avorumque ætate negotium est magistratibus datum, ut sacra externa fieri vetarent, sacrificulos vatesque foro, circo, urbe prohiberent, vaticinos libros conquirerent comburerentque, omnem disciplinam sacrificandi præterquam more Romano abolerent? Judicabant enim prudentissimi viri omnis divini humanique juris, nihil æque dissolvendæ religionis esse, quam ubi non patrio sed externo ritu sacrificaretur."

Liv. Lib. xxxix. 16.

## SECTION III.

IF Christianity, notwithstanding what has been said, did recommend itself, although destitute of sufficient evidence, to the belief of the great bulk of mankind, this must have happened from its gratifying that love of the marvellous which has been represented as so powerful a principle in human nature ; from its acting upon the hopes or fears of men, or from its introducing an equality of property, or requiring a contribution from property, which, by affording indulgence to the indolent, and presenting an enticement to the poor, may have led numbers to profess it. I know of nothing else which, with even the slightest probability, can be supposed to have facilitated its propagation ; and I shall now endeavour distinctly to investigate what effect these causes which I have mentioned may reasonably be conjectured to have produced.

The love of wonder, and a propensity to believe in the marvellous, are unquestionably, to a certain extent, principles in human nature ; their operation has even sometimes been considered as sufficient to account for the reception of any religion, however absurd, which is addressed to them ; and hence, since Christianity does certainly contain much which is wonderful, as destroying the force of the conclusion for its truth deduced from its having been readily and extensively embraced.

There are general positions which, from being art-

fully connected with what cannot be disputed, carry with them the appearance of truth, and are very apt to make an impression upon the mind, but which, when strictly analysed, are found either to be fallacious, or to have little relation to the subject for illustrating which they have been employed. This one, respecting the effect of the love of the marvellous in disseminating Christianity, will appear, I doubt not, to be among the number. An examination into the real nature of this principle, into the laws by which it is regulated, and into the influence which it exerts upon belief, - will plainly evince that it could not have the slightest effect in overcoming those prejudices against the religion of Jesus which existed in the Gentile world ; or, which is the same thing, that it could not induce those who professed the established religion to receive the Gospel.

The Supreme Being, who, with infinite wisdom and goodness, has adapted the constitution of man to the situation in which he is placed, has implanted in his breast curiosity, or a desire of extending knowledge, and has accompanied the discovery of truth with the most refined and elevated pleasure. To progressive beings, such a principle was most essential. Without it, they would have either remained in their original ignorance, or their advancement, even in the most important branches of improvement, would have been very much retarded, while, in the pursuit of many of the sciences, they would have had no motive to engage. This love of novelty, at all times comprehending the love of the marvellous, and in the first stages of human progress, being nearly synonymous with it, is thus a law of nature; and the effect of it, in inclining to belief, will be very much regulated by the degree of know-

ledge which, from experience, or from any other source, has been acquired.

Those events which are considered as marvellous, are so in relation only to us, they are as much within the sphere of possibility as the most common appearances of nature, and they may, for aught we know, daily occur to the inhabitants of other systems, to whom what is most familiar to us, and thus excites no astonishment, may be wonderful. It is accordingly almost universally admitted, by those who have accurately reflected upon the subject, that the laws of nature, by which the universe, or that part of it with which we are acquainted, is regulated, were established by the positive appointment of the Deity ; were not necessarily adopted, and were not the only laws which his infinite wisdom might have instituted. These laws, however, constitute the standard by which the probability of events must by us be determined. An intimate acquaintance with them will point out to him who has it improbability, where, by a person who had not such acquaintance, it would not have been discerned. Hence the love of wonder, or rather the propensity to believe in what is held to be marvellous, must have more extensive influence amongst the illiterate, or the great body of mankind, than amongst those who are enlightened ; because the former are ignorant of many of those laws, from the knowledge of which particular events are deemed improbable, and they thus naturally view such events as they are in themselves, or with a reference to possibility. The consequence is, either that such events do not appear to them to be marvellous, or if they do, being satisfied of what cannot be doubted, that they are possible, they do not at once reject them, just upon the principle from which we do not uniformly reject what is uncommon, and from which philosophers, when they



hear of appearances which are new to them, seek, before discrediting them, to ascertain whether they be in harmony with the laws of nature. In short, what the one class, philosophers, term marvellous or incredible, the other, the people, regard only as something of which they were before ignorant, but which, for any thing that they see to the contrary, is just as likely to be true, as many things which they have been accustomed to believe.

That this is an accurate account of that propensity to believe in the marvellous, which has been conceived to belong exclusively to the multitude, is rendered evident by this circumstance, that the great mass of mankind are as incredulous as philosophers themselves, perhaps more so, when the marvellous contradicts what they are convinced is the constitution of nature ; that is, when they view the marvellous in the same light in which the philosophers view much of what the generality of the people admit.

It is difficult to conceive any thing more wonderful, than the conjecture of a modern writer, that such will one day be the amelioration of the state of the world, that a plough will, from the exertion of its own energies, perform the work which is assigned to it. Yet, if we were to mention to the most ignorant rational being, that this had happened, or was to happen, he would be so far from instantly believing it, that he would either consider the person who gave him the information as intending to turn him into ridicule, or he would look upon him as in a state of derangement. What, in this case, so completely does away the influence of the love of the marvellous ? Just what would produce the same effect upon a philosopher, with regard to the most ridiculous story—experience.

Mr. Hume, who ascribed such power to the passion

for the marvellous, as he sometimes termed it, carried the opinions of certain philosophers who had written before him, to the utmost length, and with much appearance of seriousness asserted, as with admirable ingenuity he maintained, that there was neither matter nor mind in the universe. No discovery could be more wonderful. Yet I believe that not one of the great body of mankind, of those so easily duped by the marvellous, ever acquiesced in it, or from his passion for the wonderful, became convinced that the sun and moon, the ground upon which he trode, and the friends with whom he associated, were not external objects, but merely ideas in his own mind, or rather in no mind at all. In this instance, the love of the marvellous was weaker in the uninstructed than in the philosopher ; it yielded to common sense in the one, while in the other it, avowedly at least, did not yield to it.

It appears then, that what, under the appellation of the love of the marvellous, has been ascribed to the ignorant and illiterate part of mankind, and been considered as very much confined to them, is really the same principle, the love of novelty, the influence of which is universal. It is not therefore of the nature of enthusiasm, the effect of which upon the mind it is impossible to estimate, but a rational desire, subject to certain laws, the power of which may in most cases with much probability be determined ; and it is, though not so often, yet occasionally as strongly, felt by philosophers, as by those who are strangers to philosophy. It is of much importance to the clear investigation of the subject, thus to have ascertained what the love of the marvellous really is ; the way being now open for determining, with more precision, the connection which it has with belief.

It cannot with any shadow of reason be imagined, and indeed, as far as I know, it has never been directly asserted, that the mere circumstance of any event, or train of events being marvellous, or contrary to the established laws of nature will secure the belief of mankind. All that can be assumed is, that there will thus be created such an inclination to believe, as will prevent any very accurate examination of positive evidence ; or, in other words, that the desire that such event, or train of events, may be true, will be so strong, as to render men satisfied with a less degree of evidence than they ought in reason to require. That some evidence or testimony is required in such a case as has been stated, even upon the supposition of the greatest degree of credulity, is apparent from fact. The wonderful circumstances, so delightfully combined in the Arabian Nights Entertainments, would amuse the most ignorant, but his being amused would not authorise the inference that he believed in all which he heard. If he was inclined to believe, or if he suspected that it was true, he would satisfy himself by some kind of inquiry, and would, probably, if he had confidence in him, examine the person who read concerning the reality of the story. I suspect, however, that by much the greater number would of themselves so clearly discern that it was not true, that they would judge all inquiry to be superfluous.

There must then be evidence, or the appearance of evidence even for the marvellous ; and it is plain that the proneness to acquiesce in this evidence, without sufficient investigation, will depend upon the desire that the marvellous may be true, merely because it is marvellous, or upon the degree in which it is conceived to be probable, or upon the tendency of believing in it to gratify some other desire of the mind. The first of

these alone, the wish or desire of events being true, merely because they are marvellous, falls at present under review.

Now, this wish or desire is very far from being so strong as has sometimes been imagined ; there are many of our desires much stronger, and it will certainly be diminished or destroyed if these thwart its operation.

Suppose, for example, that any person should tell a wonderful story, belief in which was a matter of indifference, not affecting a man's situation one way or other. If the wonderful circumstances were so well contrived as to fix the attention, and powerfully interest the feelings, the story might be received as true, upon the authority of him who told it, without any scrupulous inquiry into his character for veracity, or into the sources from which he derived his information. But if he concluded his story by telling his audience, that they must give credit to it, and that the consequences of their doing so, would be the forfeiture of the comforts and blessings of life, the ruin of fortune, and the danger of bodily suffering, or even of a premature and cruel death, the case would instantly be very much changed. The prepossession which the strangeness of the story is supposed to have created, would be destroyed, and would give way to what is a much stronger principle in human nature, and much more uniformly and keenly interests mankind, anxiety for their happiness. There would be now a desire to reject the story, or if they were satisfied that, before rejecting it, they ought in conscience to examine it, the most exact scrutiny would be set on foot, and nothing less than what was believed to be the most convincing evidence would establish their faith.

It has then appeared that, notwithstanding the love of the marvellous, what is wonderful is often rejected

by the great part of mankind, from its being contrary to their experience, and their notions of possibility, as in the cases of the plough, and of the existence of the material world, or from the operation of principles in human nature more powerfully influencing the mind, as in the case which has just been stated.

These general observations or facts must now be applied to Christianity, that we may endeavour from them to ascertain whether the love of the marvellous would facilitate the progress of that religion amongst the Gentile nations to whom it was at first addressed.

The miraculous or marvellous part of Christianity, I mean that branch of it which would most obviously strike those to whom it was proposed, is, that the Son of God, commissioned by the Almighty to instruct, and reform, and redeem the world, assumed, for these interesting purposes, human nature; exercised the Divine power with which he was invested in the performance of the most stupenduous miracles; led a life of suffering, died a death of ignominy, rose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven. This is undoubtedly very wonderful, and must have appeared so to all who heard it. But it was not that species of the wonderful which would prepossess the votaries of Paganism in its favour, because it contradicted what we have found to be their conceptions of the mode of divine communication, or of the situation in which a messenger from Heaven must have appeared; that is, it contradicted their notions of the possible or the probable, in a case of this kind, and would, on this account, be considered as no less incredible than the people amongst us consider the doctrines that there is no sun, or that a plough of itself could cultivate a field.

In this view alone, then, it is apparent, that the love of the marvellous would not be enlisted on the side of

Christianity. But it is farther to be observed, that even although it had, although the miraculous part of that religion had highly gratified their imaginations, and had thus excited a wish that it might be true, the dismal consequences, so obviously resulting from the admission that it was so, would have removed the prepossession. In other words, the love of children, of wealth, of power, of life itself, would have been much stronger than the partiality produced by the marvellous, and, as is invariably the case, when more powerful principles oppose those which are weaker, would have gained the ascendancy over it, and prevented it from betraying or deluding the judgment.

I have hitherto supposed, that there was nothing to fortify the heathens against the impression of a new system exciting the love of the marvellous. But it must now be remarked, that however strong we may conceive this principle to be, it could not, in the countries where they taught, have been of much service to the apostles, because it was completely gratified by the religion previously established, and to which so many other ties attached those whom they laboured to convert. The Pagan theology abounded in wonders, much more strikingly astonishing than any thing contained in Christianity. Prodigies were very frequently reported in the manner best calculated to interest the minds of the people, and to impress them with the most superstitious reverence and awe. Any effect, then, which may be ascribed to the love of the marvellous would, supposing them to have been in all other respects upon a footing, have been more in favour of the old religion than of the new; and when we take into account the real state of the case, that the people were zealous for their own faith, while Christianity, with much less of the wonderful, shocked all their pre-



possessions, there can be little hesitation in concluding that it was not indebted to the love of wonder for its reception in the world.

It may just be added, that this religious attachment, to which I have here only incidentally alluded, is universally acknowledged to be one of the strongest principles which can actuate the human mind, and its force of operation against Christianity must, in reason, be held to have been as efficacious as that which, by the confession of infidels themselves, it has since exerted to support the faith of the Gospel.

These observations upon the love of the marvellous may prevent those who reflect upon them from being perplexed by what I believe gave rise to the objection which has been examined, I mean the prevalence of the most absurd miracles in Popish countries, and the readiness with which these miracles are credited by the people. Mr. Hume has triumphantly recorded those which were said to have been wrought at the tomb of Abbé Paris, and has set them over against the miracles of Jesus and his apostles; while many of our modern travellers have industriously gathered together all the ridiculous impositions upon the populace with which the annals of monkish superstition furnished them, imagining, I suppose, that they would secure to themselves the reputation of liberality of sentiment, and expansion of mind, by sneering at the credulous veneration which is paid to them. The information thus collected seems to have suggested the idea, that the love of the marvellous, to which they rather hastily ascribed the credit given to the foolish miracles of Popish priests, probably had the same effect in former times in gaining credit, without any proper inquiry, to those miracles pretended, as they alleged, to have been wrought in attestation of Christianity. There appears to me to

be much confusion of thought, or rather very superficial thinking, in this reasoning, and a very little reflection will show its fallacy. Miracles in the church of Rome are so far from being against the prepossessions of the people, that they are in perfect harmony with them. They are adduced, not to support a new religion, but to throw reverence and sanctity around one of which no doubt is entertained; the power of working them is, from infancy, represented as a mark of the true Church, while the belief that they are wrought, instead of militating against the comfort of life, often tends to promote the prosperity of those in whose neighbourhood they are supposed to take place. With the sentiments which a zealous and unenlightened Catholic must have, it is not possible for him, acting consistently with his opinions, to feel any hesitation in assenting to the religious wonders which the priest announces to him. But, in this, the love of the marvellous has a very small share; other causes co-operate with it, of themselves sufficient to produce the effect; the strongest prejudices, the desire of interest, and the force of religious attachment.

In the case of Christianity, it must be supposed that the love of wonder, not only abstracted from other causes, but directly opposed by the strongest principles and feelings of human nature, and by every received notion of probability, created belief. Between these two cases, then, there is not the most distant similarity, and we cannot, therefore, reason from the one to the other. To draw the same conclusion with regard to both, is very inconsistent with that genuine philosophy, which patiently investigates every shade of diversity, and breaks down associations rashly formed, which so often and so insensibly lead from the truth.

Whatever, then, may be said about the credulity of Popish countries, let it be remembered, that it all may be admitted without warranting the most remote insinuation against the evidence of Christianity.

Thus, I trust, it has appeared, from an inquiry into the real nature of the love of the marvellous, how slight is the foundation for the popular opinion attributing to its influence the reception of the Christian religion in the world, and that it may safely be concluded, that this principle of human nature could not destroy the inclination which so many causes must have produced, for most accurately examining the evidences of our religion. For this conclusion alone I am now contending.

It has also been supposed, that those Gentiles whom the apostles converted, might have been disposed credulously to embrace Christianity, from its operating very strongly upon their hopes and fears.

It is unquestionable, that what men anxiously wish to be true, they are very apt to believe upon slight, or even insufficient evidence; and that, when fear is violently excited, it is apt to darken the judgment, and occasion assent to opinions which, had they been calmly and dispassionately considered, would have been discovered to be unreasonable. It is therefore of some importance to inquire, how far these facts can be regarded as having influenced the rapid and extensive propagation of Christianity.

That mankind have constantly revolted at the idea of annihilation, and have eagerly cherished the hope that they would survive the ruins of the body, is evident from all history. Some confused conceptions of a future state of being have been traced amongst nations where the belief of a God was so much less obviously acknowledged, as to have led travellers, not attending to the infinite variety in the modifications of supersti-

tion, probably very rashly to conclude that it did not exist. Whatever, then, tends to confirm this hope, should naturally be acceptable to mankind ; and hence it is supposed that Christianity, which professes to have brought life and immortality to light, would, upon this account, however repugnant in all other respects it may have been to received opinions, be cordially embraced, as congenial to the feelings and the wishes of the heart.

It is certain, however, that the peculiar circumstances in which the Gentiles were placed, prevented this from being the case. They were not in ignorance concerning what awaited them after death ; they were not, in their own estimation at least, groping in the dark, trusting merely to the suggestions of their reason ; but they had a religion to which they were sincerely attached, which did not omit this essential doctrine of all religions, but conveyed the most positive assurances, that the soul would survive the body, giving, at the same time, such descriptions of the state destined for man, as were very much calculated to gratify, and did, in fact, completely gratify, the expectations of those who believed in them. It represented the condition of good men, in a future life, as happier, indeed, than their condition in the present, but as very much of the same nature ; the passions and affections, which actuate us here, were then to be called into exercise ; in one word, enjoyment was to be derived from similar sources. This was a representation of futurity, completely adapted to the conceptions of the more numerous class of mankind ; the value of it they could be at no loss to appreciate, and every diminution of temporal comfort would naturally lead them to fix their attention upon it.

And although their religion did make a distinction

between the virtuous and the depraved, inculcating that the former only would be happy, yet the degree of enormity, which consigned to the gloomy horrors of Tartarus was so atrocious, that vast numbers, who had not been solicitous to regulate their conduct by the strict rules of duty, were freed from the apprehension of being destined to undergo them.

Whatever then had been the views of a future life disclosed by Christianity, they could, from these circumstances, have had little effect in extending the belief of it. But the fact is, that the sublime discoveries of the Gospel, upon this subject, were little accommodated to the grovelling imaginations of the adherents of Paganism, requiring, for perceiving their excellency, a refinement of moral and religious sentiment which was very seldom to be found before the publication of Christianity. And it also taught, that strait is the gate, and narrow the way, which lead to eternal bliss, because admission into the kingdom of heaven could not be obtained, without a degree of virtue which could be acquired only by unremitted exertion, and the most rigorous self-denial.

The Gentiles must thus have regarded Christianity, not only as giving a delineation of futurity, much less pleasing to them than that of which they were already possessed, but as creating obstacles in the way to it, which they had not before suspected to exist, and which they must have been conscious of their unwillingness, or their inability to surmount. They could not, therefore, from the scripture doctrine of immortality, have been at all prejudiced in favour of Christianity.

These observations are strengthened by what has happened in the world, since the days of our Saviour. When Mahomet formed his religious system, although

he borrowed much from the Christian Scriptures, he did not adopt the sentiments respecting eternal happiness which Jesus had revealed. His accurate acquaintance with human nature suggested to him, that a very different representation was necessary for ingratiating imposture, and he accordingly flattered the passions, comprehending, in the felicity of heaven, a great degree of sensual indulgence. The effect of this upon the Arabs, to whom he immediately announced himself, is well known, and it was, unquestionably, one very powerful cause of establishing, as it has been of preserving, the very extensive influence of his motley superstition.

But although it cannot be doubted that the great body of the people, in heathen countries, did believe in those fictions concerning Elysium and Tartarus, which the brilliancy of the most luxuriant poetical fancy has so exquisitely embellished, and so successfully immortalized, the philosophers saw these fictions in their true light, and speculated very freely, and with much anxiety, respecting the final destination of men. Yet, even to them, Christianity, from various causes, was not recommended by the important discoveries which it made in relation to immortality.

It had been assumed as a fundamental principle, by many of the most enlightened philosophers of antiquity, that certainty in matters of general science, and in the doctrines of religion, could not be attained by human wisdom ; probability being all which could be expected. To this opinion Cicero gave his support, and he has, indeed, repeatedly expressed it in his philosophical writings. It followed as a direct consequence from their principle, that they never positively asserted even what appeared to be most plainly established. They, at all times, were disposed to listen to diversity of



sentiments, and were dogmatical in nothing, but that there should be no such thing as dogmatism. With respect to the immortality of the soul, their favourite maxim was conceived to possess the most obvious propriety. Many of them entertained very just ideas of what would be the nature of any future state which Divine wisdom would allot to such a being as man ; but then they considered, that the arguments for and against the existence of such a state, were so equally balanced, that, in looking towards it, they were influenced as much by the hopes and wishes inseparable from our nature, as by reliance upon any evidence which could be adduced to convince the understanding. To men entertaining these opinions, and who had investigated every argument which ingenuity could devise, the Christian religion could not be acceptable, because it overthrew all their ideas respecting the nature of truth. It positively announced that the soul would survive the dissolution of the body, and it required all who listened to it to receive this doctrine, not with the wavering of uncertainty, but with that steady conviction arising from the persuasion that the Almighty had declared it. Now, supposing that any of the philosophers had listened to the first teachers of Christianity, and had heard, even with admiration, their sentiments of immortality, still the question would have been put by him, are these sentiments founded on truth. Similar sentiments philosophers have frequently conceived and expressed ; and by what peculiar authority can you establish what they thought could not be established ? In answer to these inquiries, he must have been referred to the external evidence of Christianity ; and if he was at all convinced, it is apparent, that his conviction must have been produced by that evidence, and not by the nature of the doctrine to

which he assented. In this point of view, then, it is plain, that the manner in which Jesus and his apostles taught the doctrine of immortality, would even prejudice philosophers against it; and that, if they were led to embrace his religion, this must have been the effect of proof, distinct from the doctrine which that religion contained.\*

There was another cause which must have checked the admiration which the Christian doctrine regarding the soul, had it been abstractly viewed, might have produced.

Cicero, in some of his philosophical writings, complains that philosophy was regarded more as an exercise of genius, than as a guide of life, and that the most sublime maxims of virtue, and the justest sentiments of the dignity and happiness of human nature, were often eloquently delivered by men who withdrew from enforcing them to debase themselves by the lowest and

\* A few passages from Cicero, will establish what I have said above, respecting the sentiments of the ancient philosophers. “*Profecto eos ipsos qui se aliquid certi habere arbitrantur, addubitare coget doctissimorum hominum de maxima re tanta dissensio.*”—*Cic. de Natura Deorum*. “*Ea quæ vis ut potero explicabo, nec tamen quasi Pythius Apollo certa ut sint et fixa quæ dixero, sed ut homunculus unus e multis probabilia conjectura sequens. Ultra enim quo progredior quam ut verisimilia videam non habeo.*” *Tusc. Quæst.*—“*Harum sententiarum quæ vera sint Deus aliquis viderit, quæ verisimilia magna quæstio est.*” *Id. ibid.* “*Etsi nihil nimis oportet confidere. Movemur enim sæpe aliquo acute conclusio, labamus, mutamusque sententiam clarioribus etiam in rebus, in his est enim aliqua obscuritas.*” *Id. ibid.* “*Nescio quo modo dum lego assentior, cum posui librum et mecum ipse de immortalitate animorum coepi cogitare assensio omnis illa labitur.*” And Lactantius, speaking of the ancient philosophers, says, in harmony with what has been quoted from Cicero, “*Præterea nihil apud eos certi.*”

most abominable vices. The philosophical studies of his days were thus prosecuted, much more from the desire of distinction, than from a love of truth, or from anxiety to illustrate moral duty. To men who were in this state of mind, Christianity was little adapted, because, although it did discover the immortality of the soul, and discover it too in a manner the most congenial to unbiassed reason, still it did so, not to gratify curiosity, or to furnish matter for abstruse or frivolous speculation, but to give energy to virtue, to show most strikingly that, in every situation of human life, it is wisdom to adhere to it, and to impress upon the mind, that, without it, the possession of learning, or any other acquisition, however highly valued in the world, is, to rational beings, really of no estimation. To minds debased and corrupted by vice, this practical tendency of the scripture doctrine of a future state must have been revolting, exciting the most inveterate prejudices which pervert or darken our reason.

To all this it must be added, that the Christian view of this most interesting subject comprehended the resurrection of the body ; a doctrine which, I have already had occasion to observe, was universally rejected by philosophers, as undermining the ground upon which they rested some of their most plausible, and, as they imagined, most sublime speculations.

These observations show, that Christianity, in so far as it related to the hope of immortality, was not calculated to spread itself in the world. The strength of the argument, therefore, must be placed upon the tendency of its representations of futurity to alarm the fears of mankind.

This tendency is conceived to have arisen, not chiefly from its inculcating the awful punishment of the wicked, for this, although disbelieved by all sects

of philosophers, was explicitly taught by the established religion, but from an opinion which was very extensively entertained in the first age of the church.

The termination of the Jewish commonwealth, and the abrogation of that ceremonial code which the Jews, from the days of Moses, had, in general, scrupulously observed, was, in conformity with the bold and figurative mode of expression which the ancient prophets employed when predicting any signal calamity or revolution about to befall a nation, intimated in language which might have been used to represent the destruction of the world. Now as the apostles did frequently announce that the world was to be destroyed, and that the period at which this was to take place was involved in obscurity, the language which the sacred writers, or the first teachers of Christianity, had applied to the extinction of the Jewish economy, was interpreted by many as indicating the end of the world; so that the idea was widely disseminated, that, before the generation then existing had exhausted the accustomed period assigned to the generations of men, the heavens and the earth would be dissolved. This idea was certainly a most awful one, and the uncertainty cast around it had a tendency very strongly to affect the imagination. It has accordingly been supposed, not only that it actually did so, but that multitudes who embraced Christianity, were so intimidated by it, or so completely deprived of the capacity of investigation, that they could not calmly examine the pretended evidences of this new religion, but blindly adopted opinions which seemed to point to the only sanctuary which could protect them from impending danger, or render that danger less formidable.

This reasoning, even granting that the premises upon which it rests are just, is so unphilosophical, that had it related to any other subject than a religious system,

which many, unhappily, do not wish to be true, little regard would probably have been paid to it.

Fear can be excited only by that which men apprehend to be possible, or even, to a certain degree, likely to happen. If the event, the foretelling of which is employed to excite it, be not of this description, it will be so far from ensuring the effect, that it becomes ludicrous; and they who, through it, attempt to agitate the mind, are disregarded or despised. Now, the doctrine that the world was soon to be destroyed, would, to the heathen nations amongst which Christianity was originally propagated, appear, in the highest degree, absurd and incredible, more calculated to excite derision than terror and alarm. All the philosophers believed in the eternity of the world, and the people either had the same idea, or never reflected upon the subject. When, then, they were told that the universe, which had remained stable for so many ages, and which exhibited no apparent symptom of decay or dissolution, was soon to perish, they would naturally be affected by it in the same way as St Peter mentions that some of whom he heard were affected,\* and, in the same way in which we ourselves would be affected by the intimation of some calamity evidently existing only in the disordered imagination of the man who announced it.

And this would more certainly be the case, if, as they who suggest the objection must suppose, the apostles had previously acquired no influence over the public mind; because such a doctrine from persons who had never been considered as entitled to the slightest estimation, would, if possible, render them more contemptible than they had been, and would, most unquestionably, rather oppose than promote any end which they had it in view to effectuate.

\* 2 Pet. iii. 4.

But the whole foundation of the objection is annihilated, when we recollect the fact, that the speedy destruction of the world was no doctrine of Christianity, and was never actually taught as such by those who so successfully disseminated that religion.

The apostle Paul, whose authority upon this subject is certainly most unexceptionable, wrote to the Christian converts at Thessalonica, who, it appears, had adopted this opinion, that it was altogether erroneous ; and to satisfy them of this, he did not disclose to them any thing of which they had before been ignorant, but he merely brought back to their recollection what he had taught them the first time that he had ministered amongst them, when he had turned them from idols to serve the living God. It is evident from this, that the doctrine to which such mighty effects have been ascribed, originated from conjectures respecting the meaning of expressions imperfectly remembered, or not fully understood, and consequently, that it never would have existed, had not the conversion ascribed to it previously taken place.

And, independently of the assertion of the apostle, this conclusion should appear highly probable, even to those who, upon other grounds, have been induced to regard Christianity as the invention of imposture. No more effectual mode of arresting the progress of any new and false system of religion can be conceived, than to connect men's persuasion of its truth with an uncertain event, represented as soon to happen. If the event does not take place about the time which had been specified, there is furnished an indubitable and an obvious proof that the religion is not entitled to credit ; and in the same proportion in which they who had been led to believe in it, had shown zeal to promote its success, they would afterwards labour to guard all whom they



could influence against the delusion. This is so plain, even to the most moderately acute perception, that it is impossible to imagine, that men avowedly possessed of much judgment should not have adverted to it. It is therefore in the highest degree improbable that the apostles, had they been conscious that they were attempting to deceive their fellow creatures, would have unwisely furnished such a test for ascertaining the nature of their pretensions.

But admitting that, from some unaccountable infatuation, they had done so, what would have been the consequence? The generation which, overpowered by terror, had rashly received their religion, would soon have begun to suspect deception; and the succeeding generation, finding the world just as it had been, would not only have lost all respect for predictions, the fulfilment of which had been so long delayed, but would most naturally and rationally have abjured Christianity, returning with increased attachment to their original faith.

But the effect of such a doctrine in the primitive days of the Gospel, may be estimated, not merely from general reasoning upon human nature, but by what has actually happened at different periods, in more modern times.

Enthusiasts have frequently appeared, who endeavoured to attract notice and secure veneration, by declaring under the authority, as they pretended, of inspiration, that the world was in a few years to come to an end. And what almost invariably has been the consequence? Although these men did not promulgate a new doctrine, interfering with the received ideas of possibility, but only professed to fix the date of what all Christians believe will one day happen, so far from exciting universal alarm, they prevailed with very few to

pay to them any attention, while the great body of mankind were, from this part of their system, perfectly satisfied of their enthusiasm or madness.\* The same thing, it may reasonably be concluded, would have much more certainly happened amongst the Gentiles, had the apostles, without any external sign of their divine mission, taught, in opposition to the established religion, the doctrine which has been ascribed to them. Thus, then, whatever view is taken of the subject, it appears that Christianity could derive from this cause no assistance ; but that had it been employed, it would in all probability have retarded, and certainly would not have promoted the diffusion of our holy religion.

There is only one other circumstance which can, with any appearance of reason, be considered as ac-

\* The wonderfully universal persuasion of the approaching termination of the world, which prevailed about the tenth century, and which so powerfully influenced the minds of men, as to suspend, in a great degree, the business of life, and to lead them to renounce their property, or piously to deliver it to the ministers of the church, who showed no indifference about receiving it, arose from pretended interpretations of prophecies, the fallacy of which the profound ignorance of that age was unable to detect, interpretations, which it is much to be apprehended, were in many cases eagerly enforced by the priests, who cherished them as the most fruitful source of the wealth of the church. There was in this, then, an unprincipled attempt to delude, against which mankind, from various causes, were unable to guard. I cast out of view, however, this fraud, or to give it the most gentle, and charitable name, this folly, as having no relation to my argument, and I have alluded in the text only to the attempts of enthusiasts after the restoration of learning, when the human mind was strengthened by philosophy, or, which is the same thing, to their attempts in ages equally enlightened with that in which the Christian religion was first proposed to the subjects of the Roman empire.

counting for the rapid and extensive propagation of Christianity, without the necessity of admitting the existence or sufficiency of positive external evidence ; and the effect of that circumstance has been represented as arising from the love of interest, a principle influencing, no doubt, very strongly, the human mind, but which is generally, and, as has been found in certain cases at least, is most justly supposed to have deterred men from embracing the faith of Christ.

The first converts to Christianity were united by the closest ties. They were not so numerous as to prevent a personal and affectionate concern for the safety and comfort of each other, while the obloquy and persecution to which they all were exposed, naturally increased the attachment which their common faith had created. From these causes, a community of goods was very soon established amongst the members of the church at Jerusalem ; they threw their property into one fund, the administration of which was intrusted to the apostles, or to those persons who might be set apart for that purpose. This community of goods, or equality of possession, has been conceived calculated to have induced numbers who either had been reduced to poverty, or who were unwilling, by the activity of exertion, to keep themselves from it, to profess that they were Christians. Such an insinuation, indirectly thrown out, may make an unfavourable impression upon those who do not accurately examine the grounds upon which it rests. It is important therefore to state precisely how the fact stood, and what effect resulted from it.

Had Christianity enjoyed the protection of civil authority, or even had the profession of it been attended with no consequences in themselves formidable, there can be little doubt that, had a provision been made for every one who pretended to embrace it, many

would have done so, whatever their principles had really been. But it ought never to be forgotten, that no man could declare himself a Christian without being exposed by this declaration to infamy, to persecution, to famine, and death. Of this fact every day furnished the most convincing and affecting proofs, too plainly shewing, that no union amongst Christians, or no political measures which they could adopt, were sufficient to procure for them security and safety. Even admitting, then, that a very moderate supply, and it could not, upon any supposition, exceed this, could have been obtained by the necessitous from the contributions of the more opulent, still it must have been obvious to the most thoughtless and the most indolent, that this supply, which the slightest efforts of industry could have certainly and comfortably earned, would be too dearly purchased, at the expense of almost certain misery, and the risk of the most violent and agonising dissolution.

This, however, is stating the case much too favourably for the adversaries of Christianity, because it supposes that the fact was as they represent it; that community of goods, or at least a provision for all who wished to partake of it, was enjoined as required by the Gospel, and uniformly attended the progress and establishment of that religion. But this is not conformable to truth. The practice at Jerusalem arose from the voluntary agreement of those who had been converted, an agreement not necessarily affecting all the converts, and a dissent from which does not seem to have fixed any imputation of deficiency in zeal, or in faith. This is obvious from the Acts of the Apostles, which must convey, upon this point, the most accurate information; and it is fully proved by evidence, which cannot be disputed, that this equality continued for a

very short time even at Jerusalem, whilst, amongst the Gentile churches it never was introduced. By them, charity was placed precisely on the same footing upon which it stands at present. The rich were earnestly exhorted to contribute to the relief of the poor, but they did so according to their own judgment of the wants and the merits of the necessitous, the right of property being held sacred and inviolable.

St. Paul, in his epistle to Timothy, tells him, that if any man did not make provision for his household, he had denied the faith, and was worse than an infidel, while, at the same time, he urges the propriety of those who were possessed of wealth, assisting the destitute with whom they were more immediately connected.

These incidental expressions place it beyond a doubt that, even at this early period, the Christians amongst whom Timothy ministered were not required to renounce their property, and thus establish, that this practice was not enjoined by the Gospel, in fact, never was adopted beyond the walls of Jerusalem. It is therefore in the highest degree unreasonable to ascribe the conversion of the Gentiles to a cause which as to them had no existence.\*

But supposing that the apostles, although they were not warranted by their Master to recommend equality of possession, or the creation of an ample fund for indiscriminate distribution amongst all who professed to be Christians, had, from prudential motives, as they conceived, done so, the effect would have been the reverse of what has been imagined. Before such a fund as would have been in any degree adequate to bribe the needy to become Christians, could have been created, many persons of affluence must have resigned their

\* See Father Paul's Treatise on beneficiary matters.

wealth. What could induce them to do this? Not certainly the doctrine which I am now considering, for it must have been as offensive to them, as it was gratifying to others. Unless, therefore, they had been before-hand by some evidence converted, they would have refused their assent, and not have made a sacrifice which the firmest conviction alone could have led men to make ; and as the conversion of the wealthy would thus have been prevented, the conversion of the poor would not have followed, because the provision to which it is attributed, would not have existed.

It may indeed be remarked in general, that the abolition of individual property is very far from being a popular doctrine. Modifications of property many have ardently, and often very injudiciously wished to introduce, but to the annihilation of property itself, all men who have an idea of it would be averse. The poorest view with delight, what they can call their own, what they can use without control, and can transmit, as a token of their affection to those in whose prosperity they feel the most tender concern.

Thus, then is it apparent, that there was no inducement, from the love of interest, to embrace Christianity, without a scrupulous attention to the external evidence by which it professed to evince that it was a divine revelation.

## SECTION IV.

STATEMENT AND ILLUSTRATION OF THE ARGUMENT  
ARISING FROM THE PARTICULARS CONTAINED IN  
THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

FROM the different parts of the discussion into which I have entered, I trust it has been rendered evident,



that Christianity had originally to struggle with the most formidable obstacles. It found a religion most gratifying, in many respects, to the human mind, rendered venerable by its antiquity, supported by the power of the state, and by at least the collusion of the most enlightened part of the community; it attacked the strongest prejudices of those to whom it was addressed, requiring sacrifices which mankind must ever reluctantly make, and exposing all who were converted to it to hardships and trials from which, when viewed in themselves, we must constantly revolt, while, at the same time, it promised nothing, and was accompanied by nothing, which could, in the smallest degree, counteract the effect which these circumstances could not fail to produce.

From all this I infer, that there were no natural causes which, abstracting from positive evidence, could even facilitate the progress of Christianity, but that there were the strongest natural causes to retard that progress; and consequently, that had it been proposed to the Gentile world, without any thing to evince its Divine origin but its intrinsic excellence, and the unsupported assertions of its teachers, that it was a revelation from heaven, little serious attention would have been paid to it, and few or none would have been converted. It must, therefore, have been accompanied with some external evidence, eminently adapted to impress the mind, and, in fact, appearing so decisive as to induce men, without hesitation, to renounce their most obstinate and deep-rooted prejudices; and this evidence must have been, by all who were converted, scrupulously and minutely examined, because there was no previous inclination to regard it as sufficient, but every motive to reject it; and because there was thus no room for enthusiasm to warp and mislead their judg-

ment. These conclusions, however, it must be observed, do not necessarily imply the truth of Christianity, for it is conceivable, that where there exists the utmost anxiety to investigate evidence, and where the most strenuous attempts have been made to do so, men may, from the intricate nature of that evidence, or from the artful manner in which it is exhibited, be deceived by it. To complete the argument, therefore, it must be farther shown, that the evidence adduced for the truth of Christianity, was of such a nature, that when examined, as it would necessarily be, the fallacy of it, if it were fallacious, must, with the utmost ease and certainty, have been detected ; and of course, that the fact of such immense numbers having been converted, can be rationally accounted for only by supposing, that the evidence was fully adequate to produce belief.

It is established by the testimony of the sacred writers, and of the enemies of Christianity, that in order to overcome the reluctance entertained by the Gentiles against embracing a new, and to them a most revolting religion, the apostles not only professed to have the power of working miracles, but that they actually did perform the most astonishing miracles, in the most public manner, and in the presence of those who would most gladly have unveiled the imposture ; curing numbers who could not have been in connivance with them, because, at the period of their being restored to health, the apostles and their doctrine were scarcely known to the world. Whether such things were really done, could be determined without the possibility of deception. They who had seen their neighbours from infancy blind or lame, when they saw them all at once, in consequence of a word from the teachers of Christianity, walking like other men, and enjoying, in the utmost perfection, the blessing of sight, could have no

hesitation in ascribing so striking a change to these teachers ; and could have no doubt about admitting, that the power by which it was effectuated was superior to human ; the more so, that most of the miracles wrought in attestation of Christianity, consisted in the cure of infirmities arising from some peculiarity or imperfection in the physical conformation, and over which, therefore, imagination, however heated, could have had no influence.

But although it is certain, that unless the apostles had really wrought miracles, they could not have so extensively diffused the persuasion that they did so, I would observe, that they did not rest the truth of their master's religion chiefly on these miracles. They constantly affirmed that, if he did not rise from the dead, their preaching was vain, as also the faith which they so earnestly recommended to the world. They thus appealed to what they represented as a public fact, which had very lately, upon a most conspicuous theatre, taken place. If, therefore, they to whom they spoke, either had been doubtful whether they possessed supernatural power, or, according to an opinion very prevalent at that period even amongst men not unacquainted with literature and philosophy, had been disposed to attribute the works which they saw them perform to magic, thus getting rid of the necessity of recurring to divine interposition, they could have had recourse for satisfaction to the fact of the resurrection, which even, in their estimation, was beyond the reach of magic ; they could calmly, without having any immediate connection with the apostles, or at all relying upon their authority, have inquired into it ; and if they had not been convinced of its reality, or, if they had discovered that it never happened, they would, authorised by the teachers themselves, have paid no regard to the mira-

cles, and at once rejected Christianity. The matter was thus brought to a short issue, and it is only necessary to examine whether those professors of Paganism who were converted, had sufficient means for getting at the truth, and ascertaining whether such an event as the resurrection had taken place.

If Jesus rose from the dead, at the time specified by the apostles, the knowledge that he did so must have been very widely circulated. They declared that he suffered death, and triumphed over it by his resurrection, at the feast of the Passover, when Jews and Jewish proselytes, from all parts of the world, were assembled at Jerusalem. The degree in which such remarkable events must have attracted, and actually did attract public notice, fully evinces, that none who were in the holy city, for the purpose of shewing their veneration for the religion of Moses, and their devoted attachment to it, could have been ignorant of them, and they would, as matter of course, carry to their brethren, in the countries in which they usually resided, the report, the history, and, in fact, the proof, of the resurrection.

When, then, the apostles, in support of their pretensions, appealed to the resurrection of Christ, which, according to their account, had happened only a very few years before, and at a most remarkable time at Jerusalem, they who wished to satisfy themselves whether there was any ground for the appeal, or whether it rested upon a fiction of the men who announced it, had only to inquire at the Jews, who were every where in immense numbers to be found, and most of whom had been upon the scene, whether they had ever heard of the resurrection of this Jesus. If the Jews had united in assuring them that no such person had been crucified, and that they had never heard the slightest rumour

that any one had been miraculously restored to life, there would have been the strongest reason for discrediting the story, and it would, in all probability, have been universally discredited. That they who were converted had every possible motive, previously to their conversion, to make the most scrupulous inquiry, has been already fully established.\*

\* I have before had occasion to observe that, previously to the introduction of Christianity, the Jews were dispersed in great numbers, through the most celebrated countries of the then known world; and the facts which I am now to state in corroboration of the argument in the text, while they fully confirm this, will show that these Jews were in the practice of often going to Jerusalem, and that they constantly maintained such a correspondence with it, that they must have been in possession of all possible information respecting such an event as the resurrection of Christ, an event so directly affecting their hopes and their faith. Herod the Great, towards the end of whose reign our Saviour was born, received his kingdom from the Romans. By his will, he assigned Judea to Archelaus, with the title of king. This was confirmed by Augustus, with the exception that Archelaus was not allowed to be styled king. This man, by his tyrannical conduct, soon became so obnoxious to the Jews, that they sent an embassy to Rome, to petition that the emperor would render void the will of Herod; and they were joined there by eight thousand of their countrymen, who had been fully apprised of the tyranny of Archelaus, and who testified, in this manner, the deep interest which they took in the prosperity and happiness of their native land. Philo, writing against Flaccus, Prefect of Egypt, in the beginning of Caligula's reign, says, "there were not less than a million of Jews in Alexandria and other parts of Egypt." He adds, "for one country does not contain the Jewish people, they being extremely numerous; for which reason, there are of them in all the best and most flourishing countries of Europe and Asia, in the islands as well as on the continent, all esteeming for their metropolis, the holy city, in which is the sacred Temple of the most high God." About sixty years before



But this was not the only, nor indeed the principal channel through which information could be obtained. Judea was a province of the Roman Empire, Roman soldiers were, at all times, stationed in it ; the residence of the governor was not far distant from Jerusalem, and he had, according to custom, been present in that city, during the celebration of the Passover, the time when Jesus was crucified. Of the soldiers who attended the Governor, some had been witnesses of the resurrection, or were said to have been so, and all of them, from this circumstance, must have felt an interest in inquiring concerning it. Now these men, as they could not fail to know, from their companions, how the fact stood, would naturally circulate what they did know, when they returned to their own country, or would probably transmit an account of it to those with whom they maintained correspondence.

There was indeed such a chain of communication between Jerusalem, the scene of the resurrection, and the

Christ, Flaccus, the prætor of Asia, was accused at Rome of oppression in his province ; and one of the charges brought against him was, that he forbade the Jews of Asia to send any money out of that province to Jerusalem. Cicero endeavours to defend Flaccus, but he admits the important fact, that money was annually sent to Jerusalem by the Jews in Italy, and in all the provinces subject to the commonwealth. His words are "*Cum aurum Judæorum nomine quotannis ex Italia et ex omnibus vestris provinciis Hierosolymam exportari liceret.*" *Pro Flac.* chap. 28.—This shows, very strikingly, the facility of communication between Jerusalem and the different parts of the empire. Josephus, speaking of the Passover, says, "They (the Jews) observe this feast with great joy, and offer up at it more sacrifices than at any other ; and an innumerable multitude of persons come up to worship God, not only out of Judea, but also from other parts.—A great multitude was gathered together from all parts."



most remote countries in which the apostles taught, that there could be no difficulty in acquiring certainty with regard to it; for, as we found, the first teachers commenced their ministry in that city, they then went to contiguous nations, and thus ensured a discovery of their falsehood, if what they said had been false.

There is, however, additional proof, that they who were interested in the inquiry could be at no loss to ascertain whether Christ had risen.

The factious and turbulent spirit of the Jews had excited so much anxiety in the breasts of the emperors, that they, at all times, watched over this people with the most jealous vigilance; and there were peculiar and very strong reasons for attending to their public conduct, at the period when Christianity was introduced. It had been long reported, and it was known to be confidently believed in Judea, that a great sovereign was to arise in that country. Whatever were the sentiments of the Romans themselves, with regard to the power, or even the existence of such a person, they could not fail to perceive, that the persuasion of his immediate appearance might make a most alarming impression upon the minds of those who entertained it; might stimulate them to rebellion, and would at least afford a handle to every one who had sufficient ambition, for endeavouring to rouse his countrymen to shake off a foreign and an odious yoke. Under these circumstances, it cannot be reasonably doubted, that the most particular instructions would be given to the governors who were sent into Judea, to transmit accurate information of whatever should disturb, or might appear to them to have a tendency to disturb the public tranquillity. Now, in one sense, Jesus did not disown the title of King of the Jews. He declared that he was the person to which the expectation mentioned referred, and

he was actually put to death on this ostensible ground, that his pretensions were inconsistent with the continuance of the subjection of his countrymen to Rome, or that he had set himself up against Cæsar. It cannot be supposed that the governor, and the military officers, who, in consequence of a commission from the emperor, resided in Judea, would be so unaccountably remiss in their duty, as to pay no attention to an event which, in the estimation of the Jewish rulers at least, had prevented a formidable rebellion, or that they would convey no intelligence of the death of this pretended king, of the momentary extinction of his influence, and of the unexpected and extensive agitation which the report of his resurrection so soon produced.

There are quotations in the writings of the earlier advocates for Christianity, from what these writers call the Acts of Pilate, that is, his official communications to the Emperor; and although there is much reason to believe that, under this title, were comprehended spurious productions, of a later date than the age of Pilate, yet it is in the highest degree probable, both from the nature of the thing, and from the title of these forgeries, that, as it was an established practice with the governors of provinces to send occasional dispatches, detailing the most remarkable incidents which affected their governments, so Pilate had conveyed ample information concerning Jesus.

There is, indeed, I think, some ground for believing that Tacitus derived from sources of this kind the information which he has transmitted respecting Christ. He mentions his death as having taken place under the administration of Pilate, detailing the manner of it; and he clearly alludes to a temporary repression of Christianity, and to a sudden and unlooked for revival of it. This last clause may most naturally be consider-

ed as referring to the period which immediately succeeded the death of Jesus, when his enemies were confident that they would hear of him no more, and to those numerous conversions which took place in consequence of the resurrection; facts most likely to be transmitted by a person who was present, and which a governor must have found it incumbent on him to transmit.\*

\* Dr. Paley considers the expression of Tacitus, "*repressaque in præsens exitiabilis superstitio, rursus erumpebat,*" &c. (see page 69,) as referring to some of the persecutions which the Christians underwent; and Dr. Lightfoot, as quoted by Whitby in his Commentary upon the New Testament, infers from it, that Nero had, by some act or edict, suppressed Christianity, not only at Rome, but also in Judea. In opposition, however, even to such authorities, I have been led to adopt the interpretation suggested in the text, because it appears to me to arise most naturally from the whole of the passage in which Tacitus mentions Christianity. After recording that the Author of that religion was put to death under Pontius Pilate, he proceeds to state, not any thing unconnected with that event, but what immediately resulted from it, "*repressaque in præsens exitiabilis superstitio,*" the religion was for the present suppressed. This, however, was not long the case; accordingly he adds, "*rursus erumpebat,*" it broke out again, and that not only in Judea, the original seat of the religion, and to which it had been confined, but also in the city of Rome, that is, it reached the city, where all things which are atrocious find their way. That "*rursus*" was intended merely to denote the reappearance of Christianity, not its reappearance in Rome, where, till after its temporary repression, it had been unknown, is, I think, apparent from the words "*non modo,*" and from the appellation given to Judea, "*originem ejus mali;*" and it is farther confirmed by the observation of Tacitus, "*quo cuncta undique atrocia aut pudenda confluunt,*" a very natural and just reflection upon the first introduction of what the historian conceived to be a shocking form of superstition. In support of this interpretation of the passage, it must farther be observed, that there is no period, subsequent to

Now, it cannot be imagined that any authentic information which tended to discredit, or which actually discredited the fact of the resurrection, would be locked up from those who made inquiry concerning it.

Very soon after the introduction of Christianity into the empire, the constituted authorities took alarm at its progress. The converts were, indeed, so numerous as justly to excite apprehension that the established religion was in danger, and that the government, which that religion so strongly supported, would in consequence be subverted. Persecution, accordingly, was early directed against the religion of Jesus; a fact fully showing the anxiety of the emperors to exterminate it, and consequently proving, that had they been possessed of undoubted evidence that the resurrection, upon the reality of which it professed to rest, never

the resurrection, at which Christianity could, with any propriety, have been said to be suppressed, because numbers constantly and openly professed it. But we know that, immediately after the death of Christ, the Jews were confident that his pretensions were for ever buried in his sepulchre, and that it was just after they had begun to congratulate themselves upon the completeness of their victory, that his religion again drew the attention of men, and diffused itself with the most astonishing rapidity. I have made these observations upon the words of Tacitus, because they lay the foundation for remarking, that there is thus furnished an incidental confirmation of the following facts most important in the view of establishing the truth of the resurrection, that the death of Jesus did, for a short time, extinguish the influence of his religion, and that the report of his resurrection, which, had it been false, must have extinguished that influence for ever, did, even in Jerusalem itself, where the imposture, if it was one, could not have failed to be detected, become, within a few days after the death of Christ, the cause of converting vast numbers to Christianity, and of spreading the faith from that city to Rome, and to all the surrounding nations.

took place, they would have industriously circulated what they knew, and thus furnished all with the means of exposing the pretensions of those teachers who had at first made so powerful an impression upon their minds.

From these circumstances it is apparent, that the truth of the resurrection could have been as easily ascertained, and with as little danger of mistake, as any man in this country who wished to do so, could satisfy himself of any public fact deeply interesting mankind, that the King of France, for example, was some years ago brought to the scaffold. As, then, it has been fully shown that, from the state of the Gentile world, from the nature of Christianity, and from the consequences resulting from embracing it, every man, previously to his conversion, must have anxiously, and in a state of mind most unfavourable to the Christian cause, endeavoured to determine this point that Christ did rise, it seems plainly and fairly to follow, that the sudden conversion of such immense numbers from every situation of life, of all diversities of character and sentiment, and from every country in which the apostles taught, to a religion which, viewed in itself, they held in detestation, and the profession of which, they knew, was to be accompanied with the utmost misery in this world, can be explained only by admitting the account which is given in Scripture, that the evidence of the resurrection, the fact which produced such effects upon the mind, was so strong, that it was impossible that they who examined could have any doubt with regard to it.

The argument which I have been endeavouring to state, in support of the truth of Christianity, is thus found to rest upon most obvious principles in human nature. The force of it every man, by reflecting upon himself, may satisfactorily determine; and it cannot be



set aside, without admitting what the reason of the thing, and the whole of history abundantly confute, that mankind, nearly two thousand years ago, in a most enlightened age, were radically different from mankind in the present day, and that we are as little warranted to draw a conclusion from the one to the other, as we should be to determine, from the mode in which we would act in any given situation, what would be the conduct of a totally distinct order of beings. This, however, is so absurd, and so plainly subversive of the very foundations of all sound philosophy, and of all valuable knowledge, that he must be regarded as in the most hopeless state of prejudice, or of infatuation, who can persist in entertaining it, or who can attempt, upon such ground, to evade the evidence for the resurrection.

I must not, however, omit to observe, that the argument which I have so fully stated, has been attempted to be weakened, not indeed by any direct attack, but by insinuation. It has been remarked, that some of the most distinguished writers, about the period when Christianity was introduced into the world, certainly continued in infidelity, and it is hence inferred, that the evidence for this religion could not be so strong as it has been represented, when, upon such men, so admirably qualified to investigate and to appreciate it, it unfortunately was unable to make the smallest impression.

The fact is unquestionable, that Tacitus and Seneca and Pliny, most eminent authors of that age, were not converted to Christianity. Yet it does not follow from this, that none but ignorant and weak men embraced it. Amongst the first converts, there were many who must have cultivated the powers of their minds, and



much learning, ability, and eloquence, were very soon exerted in its defence.

This, however, is a point of very little moment, and almost foreign from the subject. It will be of much more importance to show, that the infidelity of the distinguished writers whom I have mentioned, ought not, in reason, to have the slightest influence upon our sentiments respecting the evidence of Christianity.

Had this religion been a system of philosophy, which its advocates laboured by reasoning to establish, and had the substance of it, from the ravages of time, not descended to our days, it must be allowed, that had the most enlightened philosophers, after a careful examination, rejected it, there would have been some ground for our suspecting the soundness of the arguments by which it was supported. But the evidence of Christianity consisted not of reasoning, but of facts, and all the circumstances attending its reception in the world, have been through many channels conveyed to us. We are happily, therefore, not under the necessity of being directed by the sentiments of others, because we can judge for ourselves. To renounce that judgment, and to reject what to our own understandings appears to be true, because men, who might have been influenced by ten thousand prejudices, long ago forgotten, were of a different opinion, is at once to resign our reason, and to cast away that independence of mind, without which it is vain to engage in the pursuit of science, and to which we have been indebted for emancipation from many errors upon other subjects sanctioned by the most venerable names, and which, therefore, if names had been the criterion of truth, it would have been presumption even to attempt to weaken or to dispute.

This reasoning should take away all force from the insinuation which I have stated, even although it were

granted that Tacitus and Seneca and Pliny had examined most carefully the evidences of Christianity, and had, notwithstanding, remained unconvinced of the divine origin of that religion. But the fact is, that they never did seriously engage in such an examination. They confounded Christianity with those superstitions which they justly ridiculed and despised, and made no attempt to ascertain the difference. Of this we have the best of all evidence, that afforded by their own works. Tacitus has applied to Christianity the epithet of a detestable superstition, an appellation which he certainly would never have employed, had he either read the Scriptures, or obtained an accurate account of them; for it is undoubted, that, whether our religion be derived from heaven, or was invented by men, it contains the noblest system of natural religion, sentiments of the divine nature, and of the extent and obligation of duty, which reason indeed had not fully discovered, but to which she must give her firmest assent.

Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, mentions the constancy with which the primitive Christians adhered to their faith. This he mistook for obstinacy, and punished as a crime, what he ought to have venerated as a virtue. He states to the emperor, the amount of what he had discovered against the Christians; what he had discovered, too, through those whom the fear of punishment had induced to abjure their religion, and who, like all other apostates, would naturally endeavour, by the inveteracy of their hatred, and by calumniating those with whom they had been united, to remove every suspicion of their sincerity. And what was the discovery thus obtained? That the converts to Christianity regarded their profession as the strongest motive for cherishing the love, and continuing in the practice of

the most sublime morality; for restraining them from vices most destructive to the happiness of society, but against which civil law can very imperfectly guard. Yet even this information, sufficient we may think to have suggested to the mind of a philosopher that Christianity was no ordinary system of faith, produced, even on the mind of Pliny, no favourable effect; he styles it a depraved superstition, and expresses his satisfaction, that those temples of pollution and idolatry, which had been very much forsaken, had begun again to be frequented.\*

Can there, then, remain with any man the slightest hesitation upon this point, that these philosophers knew nothing about Christianity and its evidences. If this be admitted, as admitted it must be, where is the reasonableness of asserting, that their opinions upon this subject should give a direction to ours, or that we should resign our faith in veneration of negligence, in every respect unworthy of philosophy. What induced men, deservedly held in estimation for the superiority

\* The manner in which Tacitus and Pliny have spoken of the Christians, plainly proves, that they were almost universally detested, and that the people ascribed the depravity of which they conceived them to be guilty, to the new doctrine in which they believed. This affords a strong confirmation from fact, of that which I have shown above from reasoning, that Christianity, so far from being in itself calculated to conciliate the affections of men, excited the most violent prejudices against it, and points out very strikingly the fallacy of such unqualified assertions as the following, which even writers of eminence have not hesitated to advance; that the heathen world was so much prepared for a new religion, that on this account alone, Christianity, whatever it had been in itself, would have been viewed with the most marked prepossession, and would have been cordially and credulously embraced.

of their talents, and the extent of their erudition, to act in this manner, I have already pointed out. They had hastily assumed, as an indisputable truth, that all claims to revelation were founded in delusion, and that, therefore, the existing religion, the political utility of which they discerned, was at all events to be supported; and, in the indiscriminate application of this maxim, they furnished one, amongst the many proofs which may be collected, that genius and general attachment to philosophy do not infallibly guard from error, but even sometimes fortify the mind against the impressions of truth more completely than it would have been had it not possessed them.

It being thus evident, that the infidelity of Pliny, of Tacitus and of Seneca, originating as it did in a total ignorance of Christianity and its evidence, does not in the slightest degree invalidate the argument for the truth of that religion, which the rapid and numerous conversions of the Gentiles afford, it may now with confidence be asserted, that as, from the constitution of human nature, men would not without evidence have embraced the faith of Christ, and as the evidence for the resurrection was of such a kind, that the most ignorant who attended to it could not fail to decide upon its force, the fact, that this evidence did overcome the strongest antipathies, and did counteract the most powerful attachments, evinces, in the most striking and persuasive manner, that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and that the religion which he published to the world, ought to be received as a Divine Revelation.

## CHAP. V.

## HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE ARGUMENT.

THE argument which I have stated, ought rationally to determine our belief in the resurrection, although, in periods subsequent to the introduction of Christianity, no examples had occurred in the history of mankind, of the difficulty of overcoming religious prepossessions. But to do full justice to it, it may now be observed, that the very limited success which has attended those efforts that in more modern times have been made to disseminate the Christian religion amongst heathen nations, or to introduce reformation of religious sentiment amongst Christians themselves, remarkably illustrates and confirms it.

The church of Rome, either from zeal for a religion which she has so much corrupted, or from the desire of enlarging, for temporal purposes, the bounds of her spiritual dominion, has made many attempts to propagate the faith, and has conducted these with that consummate policy, which she has so often with the utmost dexterity employed, using every method to conciliate the minds, and to gratify the inclinations of those whom she was eager to convert. The missionaries, to whom she intrusted the execution of her designs, were instructed not to propose Christianity, even in that degree of purity in which her votaries profess it, but to accommodate it to the prejudices of the heathens, rendering it as conformable as it possibly could be rendered to their previous sentiments. Agreeably to these



instructions, they so intermingled the Christian faith with the rites and practices of idolatry, that they composed a religion differing rather in name than in essence, from that which they endeavoured to subvert, and strove to convince those to whom they addressed themselves, that this was the religion of the Son of God, or a revelation from heaven.

But, although they thus in fact altered very little the opinions of those amongst whom they exercised their ministry ; although they spoke to men sunk in ignorance, and in this way possessed the immense advantages which civilization and learning imparted to them, and although they were certainly very far from being deficient in zeal, omitting no opportunity of effectuating the design of their mission, what was the result ? That numbers did indeed profess Christianity, while they conceived this to be only a matter of novelty or of amusement, but that they rejected it with indignation and horror, the moment that they found that this profession estranged them from the faith which their fathers had transmitted to them, and which they themselves most firmly believed to have been originally the gift of superior beings, friendly to their country, and at all times eager to preserve their safety, and promote their comfort. At this day, accordingly, in many of those countries from which there were once transmitted the most flattering accounts of the triumph of Christianity, scarcely a vestige of it remains. The great body of the people shrink from the recollection of it, and would without hesitation sacrifice to their zeal, or their resentment, any who should endeavour again to introduce it.

Even where greater success has happily attended religious exertion, that success has been very different in manner, and in degree, from the success of the apostles.



It has been the consequence of long continued efforts judiciously made, of acquiring the public esteem and veneration, by benevolently introducing the knowledge of arts contributing to the comfort and happiness of life, and of thus gaining to a certain extent the direction of education, and the superintendence of youth, through which a great effect may gradually be produced upon belief.

But both these cases conspire to show, how difficult it is, even with every advantage, to introduce a new religion, and thus powerfully confirm what has been stated, that nothing but the most obviously miraculous facts could have rendered the case so different, with regard to Christianity.\*

\* I have somewhere seen it observed, in confirmation of the opinion that the rapid propagation of Christianity was occasioned by the writings of the philosophers, which had created a very universal disbelief of the established religion, that the Hindoos, amongst whom this cause, and the effect ascribed to it does not exist, have resisted every effort to shake their attachment to the religion of their ancestors; and thus the fact of the difficulty experienced in conquering religious prejudices, which I have urged above in support of Christianity, is with some ingenuity pressed into the service of infidelity. I have in a former note fully shown, that the opinion which this author assumes as unquestionable is unfounded, but I would just farther observe, that there is surely a much more obvious cause of the rejection of Christianity by the Hindoos than the want of philosophers and philosophic writings. The missionaries who attempted to convert them did not profess to be endowed with supernatural power; they proposed Christianity as the religion of heaven; but they could do no more than assure the people that it was so. To such an assertion it was natural to answer, we have a religion which they whom we most esteem and revere have uniformly venerated as divine; you are strangers to us, and you cannot expect that we will show more deference to you than to our

Europe itself exhibits a remarkable example of the strength of religious prepossession. When the tyranny and licentious corruption of the church of Rome gave rise to the Reformation, it might have been expected that it would be universally welcomed and easily established. It left the foundation of faith untouched ; it professed to eradicate only what was wrong, and it appealed, for the propriety of every change which it sought to effectuate, to what all acknowledged to be the word of God. Yet it is certain that it was indebted for the progress which it made to a providential concurrence of external causes. Without the existence of these, it would to all human appearance have been with as much ease suppressed, as attempts of the same important nature had repeatedly been ; and even with advantages which fixed upon it universal attention, and led to the freest discussion, it is in many countries persecuted and detested, numbers still adhering to the

fathers. Till, then, by some work plainly surpassing human power, you can evince that you are the servants of God, and commissioned by him, we will adhere to that faith, of the purity and sanctity of which we have never entertained a doubt. This I suspect, would be the reasoning of a Hindoo, as it would be of any illiterate man in the same situation ; the superior excellence of Christianity being much too refined a consideration to produce any strong effect upon his understanding. It may then be truly affirmed that the failure, or comparative failure in converting nations to the faith of Jesus, which has been in modern times experienced, warrants the observation, that unless there had been miracles, or supposed miracles attending the introduction of our religion, it would, as has in other cases so often happened, have been universally rejected, or very slowly established. And this leads us to the acknowledgment of its truth, since it has been made apparent, that the miracle of the resurrection was of such a nature, that, had it not taken place, the imposture would, with the utmost ease, have been detected.

opinions which it strove to explode, and continuing in the belief of those absurdities which an ignorant or an infatuated priesthood had, in ages of darkness, imposed upon the credulity of mankind.

There cannot be a more astonishing example of the difficulty of removing religious prepossessions from the minds of those who conscientiously hold them; and it certainly tends to support the conclusion, that in the heathen world, where such prepossessions existed in full strength, the apostles would have effectuated little, if the miraculous event upon which they built their new religion had not been undoubted. Any impression which they might have made, would have been quickly effaced, and, at this day, there would have been as little vestige of the influence or existence of Christianity, as of the influence and existence of those religious impostors who were dragged by the enemies of our faith from the obscurity which they merited, to be set in opposition to our Saviour.

But Christianity, on the contrary, from the period of the death of its author, gained ground in the world. The light of truth which it emitted gradually dissipated the darkness of prejudice and of error, and it now prevails in many countries, not, indeed, without its enemies, but, in lustre and beauty, more conspicuously displayed through their opposition. Its evidences have been clearly stated, the excellence of its precepts, and the sublimity of its doctrines have been illustrated; and, after the investigation of ages by men eminently qualified to ascertain the justness of its claims, it is gratefully received by the wise and the virtuous as the revelation of God.\*

\* I have thought it unnecessary to say any thing of the establishment of the Mahometan religion, because I believe it is universally admitted, that the causes which produced that establish-

I have thus fully stated the different parts of this argument, both because it is in itself most conclusive, affording an indirect testimony to the veracity of the apostles, and because it shows incidentally, and, on that account perhaps, to many, more satisfactorily, that these men could not be deceived, through the influence of enthusiasm, with regard to their Master's resurrection. Had this been the case, had the deranged state

ment were fully adequate, without Divine interposition, to secure the effect. The accommodating nature of its morality, so gratifying to the peculiar habits and practices of eastern nations; the extent of its scheme, comprehending the leading doctrines of the various religions and religious sects which it found subsisting; the power of the sword which, with the most awful success, was employed to enforce it; and, above all, the ignorance and barbarism of those to whom it was first proposed, prove, that its rapid progress is not inconsistent with that which has been stated concerning the aversion of mankind to change their ancient faith. Neither is it necessary to make many observations upon the conversions which so frequently, during the dark ages, took place amongst the barbarous nations of Europe, and which history faithfully represents as having often resulted from some political arrangements of the sovereign, in which the great body of the people had no interest; because it is well known that the public mind was, from many causes, predisposed to the reception of that religious system, which was then supposed to be Christianity; that the conversion or the apostacy of the prince had really very little effect upon the sentiments of his subjects, however they may have occasionally seemed to adopt his faith; and that the astonishing mental darkness which then clouded Europe, rendered it very easy for the priests, who preserved amongst themselves the few scattered rays of science which had not been extinguished, to secure a belief in miracles, pretended to be wrought in attestation of their system; which, had they been actually wrought, all must acknowledge would have been sufficient to produce a rational faith, and which, therefore, naturally had this effect upon those who, though weakly, were certainly convinced of the reality of what was represented to them as the agency of heaven.

of their imaginations led them to conceive that they saw him, when he was really in the grave, this could have influenced only themselves, or those who had previously been much attached to Jesus, and had, from that attachment, been strongly prepossessed with the idea that he was again to appear. But, by such as were not in this state of mind, the matter would have been seen in its true light, and they would at once have rejected what, upon this supposition had not, and indeed could not have the faintest shadow of proof. The fact, however, that such immense numbers of all descriptions of men, who had the strongest prejudices against the peculiar nature of Christianity, did believe in an event which, if it had never happened, and if it had been simply affirmed, must have appeared obviously false, places it beyond a doubt, that the first teachers of our religion did propose evidence of what they declared, at least so plausible and striking, that the keen eye of enmity could discern in it no insufficiency. Such evidence it must have required much exertion of calm judgment to contrive, an exertion incompatible with the folly or the warmth of enthusiasm, and which supposes a previous conviction of the falsehood of what they wished to propagate. If, therefore, we adhere to the supposition that the whole was a delusion, we must also admit, that the apostles affirmed what they knew to be false ; an opinion so encompassed with difficulties, that no man, consistently with common sense, and with those principles and laws of belief upon which he invariably acts, can adhere to it.

Had I only stated in general the influence of Paganism upon the human mind, and the unfitness of Christianity to counteract that influence, there would have been necessarily so much vagueness in the assertions, that the justness of them could not have been so



strikingly perceived, and they might have been opposed by contradictory assertions, which, to many who did not investigate them might, have appeared equally probable. For this reason I have submitted the grounds upon which the different parts of the argument rest, mentioning particularly the facts which have determined my opinion; and I have thus both enabled every person to judge of the argument for himself, and have laid those who are not convinced by it under the necessity, not merely of asserting that the reasoning is inconclusive, for that may be done by any man however ignorant he may be of the subject, but of showing that reason and human nature do not warrant the inferences which, from the facts, have been deduced. This must be my apology for the length of the discussion, though I trust the chain of reasoning has not been enfeebled or destroyed.

## CONCLUSION.

I have now endeavoured to illustrate the different parts of the general evidence for the resurrection of Christ. Each of them tends, in a greater or a less degree, to establish the reality of that interesting event; and when they are conjoined, they afford a strength of proof which cannot be resisted without undermining the foundation of evidence, and adopting principles and rules of judgment which lead directly to universal incredulity.

From the beautiful manner in which all the parts of this evidence conspire to prove the resurrection, there arises evidence of a peculiar nature, distinct from any one part of the evidence itself.



That imposture may wear the appearance of truth no one can doubt ; but this has, and indeed must have its limits. No impostor can guard every avenue of detection, and the best concerted story has often been exposed by some trivial circumstance which, from its apparent insignificance, had never been taken into consideration. But the apostles, little skilled in human nature, and in the art of deception, as they undoubtedly were, have given to the world evidence for the resurrection, arising from many different sources, over some of which they could have had no control. Yet in whatever way we examine the fact all is harmony. Whether our attention is fixed upon the situation and conduct of those who professed to be the witnesses of it, or upon the effect which their annunciation of this event produced upon mankind, we are brought to the same conclusion,—that Christ certainly rose from the dead, and that the religion which he published is a Divine Revelation.

If what has been said upon this subject be not erroneous, it is plain that the evidence in support of the resurrection tends to produce belief, not in consequence of abstract reasoning, which might bewilder rather than convince, and which might be attacked by contrary reasoning sufficient to perplex the great part of mankind, but by appealing to principles in our nature universally recognised, and that it thus gives rise to a degree of certainty adequate to the removal of every doubt which considerations, not directly subverting the evidence, might otherwise have raised. This view of the evidence is of so much consequence, that a few remarks, in illustration of it, will form a natural, and, I hope, not an unsatisfactory conclusion to this work.

It has been often urged, with the view of destroying the effect which the positive evidence of Christianity

has produced, or naturally tends to produce, that all the religions which have ever subsisted in the world, have been accompanied by proof, recommending them to the cordial faith of those who professed them; that the evidence for no one of them, although appearing unanswerable to its own adherents, made an impression upon those of contrary sentiments; and that thus certainty in matters of faith has often existed where truth was not to be found. From all these positions it has been inferred, that even although we should be unable to detect any fallacy in the evidence for those religious opinions to which we are attached, or to which we are inclined to assent, we ought to be very incredulous, or rather to regard it as a matter of uncertainty, whether all religions be not the offspring of fraud or of enthusiasm.

This mode of reasoning might be very successfully resisted, upon the ground that it involves in it the principle that we cannot distinguish between truth and falsehood, or that we are in a maze of error, from which, by no exercise and cultivation of our faculties we can be extricated, a principle most unworthy of an infinitely wise Creator, and most degrading to man. But, without entering upon such a discussion, I would only observe, that the evidence for the resurrection has appeared to be of such a nature as completely to prevent the application to it of the sophistry which I have stated. Upon the operations of our own minds we can unquestionably reflect; the influence of certain motives upon mankind in general we can accurately trace; if we could not, it would be impossible to live in society, we could form no consistent scheme of conduct, and we could not decide upon the steps which we ought to adopt in our intercourse with our fellow creatures. Now, if we can acquire knowledge in this manner, we

can determine absolutely concerning the evidence for the resurrection; for we have only to look into ourselves, and to survey those around us, to be satisfied that men do not attempt what they believe to be impossible, or that they do not, without some motive, or rather contrary to all motives, prefer misery, and affliction, and death, to the comforts and the innocent enjoyment of life.

Before, then, we can, upon the ground which has been stated, rationally disregard such evidence as that for the resurrection, we must be assured of this much at least, that the evidence for other religions is as strong; that is, cannot be rejected without involving us in the same difficulties which arise from disbelief of the resurrection. This, however, must be ascertained, not by vague conjecture and speculation, but by patient inquiry, and, consequently, the presumption against Christianity, which took for granted that all inquiry was unnecessary, is obviously unreasonable.

But the evidence for the truth of the Christian religion, by which I here always mean the positive evidence, the evidence of the facts upon which it rests, has been conceived to be weakened or destroyed, not indeed by contradictory evidence, in the strict sense of the word, but by objections proving, as has been supposed, the falsehood of that religion, as certainly as the other evidence could prove its truth; and it has been hence inferred, that although, in the positive evidence, no defect can now be discovered, it ought not to be regarded as conclusive, because the same doctrine cannot be both true and false.

The objections to which I allude, which are very often thrown out in conversation, and thrown out too with the express design of showing how needless it is to confute that evidence of fact, which infidelity has sought

in vain to subvert, are such as these ; that the Christian religion is confined to a small part of the earth ; that its effects, in improving the moral state even of those who most cordially believe in it, have been almost, or altogether imperceptible ; that numberless evils, such as wars and persecutions, have arisen from it ; that, in most countries, it has been very much corrupted, and that many ages elapsed before it was promulgated. Now all these things are represented as most inconsistent with the perfections of the Supreme Being, and as fully warranting the conclusions, that a system of religion, thus degrading to his perfections, cannot have originated from him ; that no miracles could establish that it did proceed from him ; and that it is wasting time when we attempt to discover whether miracles really happened.

These conclusions, however, are rather too hastily, and, although often held by men claiming to be ranked very high as philosophers, certainly not very philosophically deduced ; for it is a fundamental maxim in all matters of this kind, and indeed a self-evident one, that nothing can overthrow positive evidence except contradictory evidence, or, what renders all evidence inadmissible, apparent absurdity in what is attempted to be proved ; such absurdity as that two and two make five, or that what existed at a particular time, had, at that time, no existence. But the objections which I have stated, do not fall under either of these classes. They do not prove, or profess to prove, that miracles were not wrought in attestation of Christianity ; that the resurrection, for instance, never took place ; neither do they prove any absurdity or impossibility in Christianity itself, for it is not denied that this religion is, in the highest degree, excellent ; they amount only to this, that, in the estimation of those who urge them,

it would have been more consistent with Divine Wisdom, that there had been no room for making them ; that the Gospel, for example, had been sooner published, and had been more extensively diffused.

But here a previous question occurs, whether we are absolutely sure that this opinion, respecting the Divine wisdom and goodness, be well founded? If we have all the knowledge which is requisite for deciding this point, if we can penetrate into the Divine mind, and certainly determine what, in all cases, the Deity must do, then, no doubt, we may argue very confidently upon the ground which has been mentioned, and we may safely acquiesce in the conclusions to which it leads us. But the fact is, that we are not quite so wise as the objectors suppose us to be. Who can thoroughly comprehend the most ordinary methods of the administration of Providence ; who can give a satisfactory reason why we are constituted in the precise way in which we are, why food was rendered necessary to sustain existence, and mental exertion to arrive at intellectual enjoyment. Every part of God's works may show us that he often hides himself in secret places, that we cannot see him ; that he embraces ends, and employs means for the attainment of these ends, of which we are ignorant, and that we are less qualified to decide upon the fitness of the elements of his stupendous scheme, than upon the fitness of the minute parts of the most complicated machine, of which all our knowledge is derived from momentary inspection.

Objections, then, founded upon ignorance, or upon our incapacity thoroughly to explain why any one thing takes place rather than another, are really entitled to very little attention. If they afford any presumption against a revelation, it is so very slight, that positive evidence ought at once to remove it. This may be il-



lustrated by a very common example. It frequently happens that we hear actions ascribed to a particular person of which we, before-hand, believed him to be incapable, and this impression may be so strong as to lead us to discredit the report. But if any one, in whom we have confidence, assures us, from his own observation, that the actions were really performed, we, without further hesitation, give up our preconceived opinion, justly concluding, that our acquaintance with the character or capacity of the agent, had not been so great as we imagined. In the same way, had we, with the general sentiments of Deity which we possess, occupied ourselves, antecedently to experience, in conjecturing about the manner in which a world, framed by him, would be arranged and administered, we should certainly have given the preference to a different mode from that which has been adopted. But no wise man, on this account, conceives that the world was not created by God, he only concludes that there must have been reasons for the present scheme apparent to that Being in whom are the treasures of wisdom, which the limited faculties of man cannot discern.

The case then, with respect to the objections which have been urged, stands thus. Christianity is supported by direct evidence, admitted to be such as naturally tends to produce belief; while, to counteract this evidence, nothing more is alleged, than that there are circumstances attending this religion, which, to some, appear inexplicable; but which, for any thing which is known to the contrary, may have originated from infinite wisdom. It follows then, that, even although nothing could be urged immediately removing the force of these objections, which, however, is far from being the case, they would not render infidelity reasonable, while the positive evidence retains its strength;



or, in other words, there exists, notwithstanding these objections, an obligation to prove that there is no sufficient testimony for the facts of Christianity, before, consistently with sound philosophy and common sense, that religion can be rejected. We must, therefore, in fact, recur to the solution of the question respecting the reality of the resurrection, and if it can be shown that this did not happen, then, and not till then, may it be confidently affirmed, that the religion of Jesus is not derived from Heaven.

The necessity of confuting the positive evidence for Christianity has, in the estimation of some, been totally superseded, by an opinion which has been of late, with peculiar zeal, enforced, that all religion is adapted to the infancy of the human race, and that every form of it, although venerated in ages of ignorance, may, by those happily enlightened by philosophy, be dismissed without the slightest investigation. No objection perhaps could have been started, more inconsistent with the genuine spirit of philosophy, or which evidences more determined prejudice, although they who most eagerly press it, anxiously lay claim to liberality of sentiment, and profoundness of judgment. When we find it urged, it is vain to bring forward evidence, however strong, in defence of religion, for the cause is predetermined, and evidence is, with the utmost credulity, ridiculed and despised. The objection owes its origin to that principle of association, which so often insensibly misleads us, and which it is one great office of philosophy to direct. The ideas of ignorance and of religion have somehow been joined together, and by a very summary process it has been decided, that the annihilation of the former, implies the destruction of the latter. The fact, however, is, that the Christian religion was established in the

world, under the most brilliant illumination of science, before the termination of that Augustan age of literature, which produced so many writers whose works will be ever held in the highest veneration, and when the sum of knowledge, with the exception of the demonstrative and experimental sciences, was certainly not inferior to that which at present exists in Europe. It is true that, some ages after, the barbarians from the north did obliterate every trace of knowledge, and plunge the nations of the empire into the darkest ignorance ; but this had no more connexion with Christianity than with the light of the sun, arising as it did from causes over which no system of faith could have had the slightest influence.

Whether, however, the Christian religion was promulgated in an ignorant or an enlightened period, is merely an accidental circumstance. The point which every rational being should be solicitous to investigate, is quite distinct from this ; it is, whether Christianity be a divine revelation ?—a point which can be decided only by a thorough examination of the evidence upon which it founds that pretension.

The observation, then, that it is the offspring of ignorance, may at once be dismissed as frivolous and foreign to the question. But it may just be observed, that supposing it were true, the conclusion deduced from it does not apply to Christianity ; because the evidence for its truth is addressed to principles in our rational and moral nature, universally recognised, which have existed at all times, and which must exist and direct the judgment, however far the human race may advance towards perfection. Unless the order of nature be destroyed, and man become a different being from what he is at present, testimony must continue to be the source from which his information must be chiefly

derived, and the sufficiency of that testimony must be estimated by the very same criterion employed in the case of the witnesses of the resurrection. The evidence for our holy religion is thus wisely so framed, as to preserve undecaying strength, resolving itself into truths to which all must assent, that misery will naturally be avoided, and happiness naturally pursued. Unless such positions as these cease to be just, and unless we renounce the plainest dictates of our judgment, we must hold Christianity to be a divine revelation, till, by confuting the positive evidence which establishes its truth, we rationally prove the claim to be destitute of foundation.

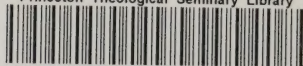
So far from having any reason to apprehend that the improvement of our intellectual faculties, and the consequent advancement of knowledge, will be fatal to Christianity, we may indulge the delightful hope, that, by dissipating those prejudices which have so often arrested men at the very threshold of inquiry, and, by placing in a just light the immense variety of its evidence, they will be the instruments employed by the beneficence of providence to establish it much more universally in the world. Every shade which may have obscured its celestial beauty, having, through them, been removed, it will exert its full influence in refining the human character, in diffusing the most sublime virtue, and, in thus preparing mankind for that future state, in which the darkness surrounding us upon earth shall be dispelled, in which we shall ascend in the scale of being, and obtain views of the administration of the Almighty, and of the extent of his works, which will invariably conjoin the happiness arising from the increase of wisdom, with the pleasures of devotion.

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